WESTY MARTIN ON THE SANTE FE TRAIL

PERCY KEESE FITZHU[illegible]

1920 500 gift-v as is

Happy Birthday
To Joe
from
Betty

Joe Driessen

WESTY MARTIN
ON THE SANTA FE TRAIL

WESTY MARTIN ON THE SANTA FE TRAIL

BY

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

Author of

THE TOM SLADE BOOKS
THE ROY BLAKELEY BOOKS
THE PEE-WEE HARRIS BOOKS

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WESTY MARTIN ON THE SANTA FE TRAIL

CHAPTER I

WESTY GETS A GOOD START

WESTY felt that he was in hard luck! In fact, he felt that Fate had played the meanest kind of a trick on him, just when he needed all his vision to live up to the plaudits of the multitude.

The truth of the matter was, some stray particles of dust had been blowing around and at a most inopportune moment sought seclusion in his eye, much to the annoyance of our hero.

Now, Westy Martin had every qualification needed to deserve the title of hero. At least every scout in Bridgeboro was unanimous in this instance, so, what right has a tenderfoot questioning the wisdom of the scout's decision!

Indeed, if one were to betray any tendency toward

incredulity, by so much as a slightly uplifted brow, they would descend en masse upon the unbeliever and shout with loud derision. In short, you would be the object of their amazement that your stupidity could be carried to the point of not knowing who Westy Martin was.

They would then go on to tell you in stentorian voices (Pee-wee's being the nearest and loudest, thus forcing you to move a little out of its range) that Westy Martin was now about to embark upon the motion picture industry through the intervention of Mr. Madison C. Wilde, Field Manager of Educational Films.

"Why, sure," gasped Pee-wee, taking the center of the stage as usual, "this Mr. Wilde has always been friendly with the Martins ever since Westy did a good turn for him out in the Yellowstone. And now, this summer, Mr. Wilde is going down through some parts of Texas and New Mexico and take some pictures of the Santa Fe Trail. When it goes on the screen the name of the picture will be, To-day and To-morrow."

"You poor dumb-bell, it will not," interposed Ed Carlysle. "It's to be titled, The Old Santa Fe Trail —Past and Present."

"Well, what's the difference anyhow? It all sounds the same to me."

Whereupon Ed was at once silenced with a menacing stare from Pee-wee, who continued to tell the interested onlooker of just what Westy's duties with Educational Films would consist of. Upon that point Pee-wee did not make himself quite clear, as he didn't know, nor had he the faintest idea. Neither did any one else.

However, that did not detract one bit from the glamor that now encircled Westy like a halo. Enough that Mr. Wilde had invited Westy upon the trip. Who would want any more prestige than that? Pee-wee wanted to know.

Lastly, Westy was none other than the boy of Rocky Mountain fame and the protégée of Uncle Jeb Rushmore of Temple Camp, the best scout in America since Buffalo Bill. Yes, sir, and he had taught Westy all there was to know about real scouting in pioneer fashion.

After Pee-wee or any others got that explanation off their respective chests and you had the audacity to confess ignorance of Uncle Jeb's fame also, why your case would be classed as hopeless. Hopeless, that is, so far as the affairs of real he-men were con-

cerned. A look of the most profound pity would be cast in your direction and then, as if time was too valuable to be wasted on one of second-rate intellect, you would be dismissed from their minds.

Following the line of perspective, Westy presently came into view again on the observation platform, bowing to his comrades with adolescent indifference.

By this time, even the most incredulous bystander of the lot could not help thinking, in view of all Westy's gathering, seeing must be believing. He did seem, by all the rules of the game, a veritable god and hero as it were, standing there surrounded by such a galaxy of admirers.

Yes, it could not be denied that he looked impressive with Mr. Wilde sitting at his elbow and his family gathered around him with Billy, the cameraman, also looking on.

Ripley Langley (Rip for short), the other junior member of the expedition, was among those present and also a nephew of Mr. Wilde's. He was lolling about on the polished railing, watching the scene with amused interest. He was that kind of a boy. Things always amused and interested him simultaneously.

When the clang of steel platforms dropping and

all the other last-minute activities warned them that time was short, Mr. Wilde bid farewell to Westy's parents and went inside, leaving him alone for the moment before the train started.

Mrs. Martin kissed her son fondly and wiped aside the stray tear. Mr. Martin, with a brusque but kindly handclasp, ran true to form and admonished him to steer clear of the Indians he should encounter. He told Westy that they could not be trusted even in these civilized times; there always being danger of reverting to the savage state. After a few other warnings, Mr. Martin took his leave, thoroughly satisfied that his duty was well done.

Thereupon, in wild acclaim Westy's brother scouts emitted cheers loud and long, led in a big voice by little Pee-wee.

"Bring me back an Indian souvenir, Wes!" Artie Van Arlen shouted.

"Yeh, me too!" came from Ed Carlysle and Warde Hollister in unison.

Then as the cries of All Aboard were heard and the train moved out slowly, Pee-wee's voice roared. He just couldn't resist a parting shot.

"Say, Wes, bring me back a hunk of cactus in your hip pocket, will you?"

"Sure thing! 'By!"

CHAPTER II

RIP ISN'T CONVINCED

WESTY stood where he was for a few moments, loathe to leave the spot where he had so recently been the cynosure of every eye. Truly, it was gratifying, that knowledge, and he was pleased with himself. What boy wouldn't be? He had been publicly acclaimed as a hero, and now being identified with the movies served to distinguish him more than ever.

If the casual bystander could have seen him at that moment, I am afraid that Westy's heroic appearance would not have been quite so manifest. At any rate, he certainly looked for all the world as though he was in the throes of deepest grief.

Try as he would, he could not prevent the moisture from emanating out of his blinking eyes. He presented a pitiable contrast to his recent triumphant state, and he knew it. His other eye had also become afflicted with the same foreign substance, now

making his visionary powers difficult with either one. And he was sore at the world. Sore, because he was afraid that he wouldn't be able to convince Rip Langley of the true cause of his affliction.

He knew what Rip would think when he caught sight of his tear-stained face; that he was crying because he had just left his father and mother behind. That's what Rip would think.

For some reason or other, Westy had a feeling about Rip already. He felt that this boy, his junior by a year and a half, was something of a skeptic and it was his first move to set him on the right track at the start.

Presently then, Westy sauntered in the smoking room with an air of perfect nonchalance. His friends were lounging about—Rip included.

Stepping up to a large mirror over the lounge, Westy made a great pretense of examining and administering to his overflowing orbs.

"'Lo!" said Rip suddenly, but friendly.

"'Lo!" answered Westy, relieved but yet feeling Rip's searching eyes at his back.

Mr. Wilde also looked up with the inevitable unlighted cigar in his mouth and the derby hat in its accustomed place. He smiled.

Fine, so far, Westy commented to himself secretly.

"Well, what's the dirt?" Rip questioned, typical of himself and looking straight at Westy.

"What dirt?" He floundered a little but, gathering courage again: "Where?"

A chuckle of cynical good humor escaped from Rip.

"In your eye! Where did you think I meant?"

CHAPTER III

A DANGEROUS SILENCE

It was quite late and the usual hum and buzz of masculine voices in the smoking room were missing. The train went screeching through the dark, rainy night, indifferent to all else save the purpose of its own mission in life.

Westy and Rip were sitting opposite one another, trying to penetrate the inky blackness outside the dripping window panes. Nothing but a shroud of blackness covered the earth. They gave it up.

"Gee, I'll be glad to walk on the ground again," Rip said, breaking the silence.

"Here, too," agreed Westy. "Morning can't come quick enough to suit me."

Mr. Wilde, occupying the seat with them, laid down the book he had been reading and grinned genially.

"Getting kind of restless, eh, kids?"

"I'll say we are!" said Rip, spokesman for the two. "Do we hoof it very much, Unk, after we

leave this ring-tailed roarer in the morning?"

"Somewhat. I dare say you'll both have enough walking by the time we're ready to come back. We are to start out from a place called Wakarusa. Outfit will be all ready for us to get away at once. No waiting, thank goodness."

"Outfit?" queried Rip. "What's this going to be, Unk; another covered wagon affair?"

"Not so's you'll ever notice it. Catch you modern kids traveling in a covered wagon. With all that either of you have learned about scouting I'd like to see what you'd do with the few necessities that the old pioneers had to do with in the days on the Old Trail."

"Oh, I don't know," Westy protested. "Uncle Jeb gave me a lot of dope that I could use in a tight pinch. We could do a lot if we had to, eh, Rip?"

"Betcha life," he replied airily. "We could show some of these modern pikers a thing or two."

It is to be seen that when it came to getting on the defensive side of scouting, Westy and Rip pledged a momentary truce and became kindred spirits; to Mr. Wilde's enjoyment. He was having the time of his life kidding them.

"All right, scouts, I hope you will get the chance

to show me then some day. But I am afraid you're going to be disappointed on this trip if you've been looking forward to anything more exciting than shooting the scenery. I gave my solemn promise to both your parents that I'd keep the watchful eye all over. When we get back home you and Westy can give me a few exhibitions of your skill and prowess in the back-to-nature bunk in Martin's back yard.

This was adding insult to injury of course, but neither of them could make a come-back. Mr. Wilde could see by their expressions that the parental promise hadn't made a very big hit with them at all.

Billy, who had been peacefully dozing throughout the discussion, came to with a yawn.

" 'S no use sitting up listening to the rain all night. What d'you say?" He addressed them all.

"I guess we better," answered Mr. Wilde, and motioning to the boys as he walked toward the open doorway. "Better turn in, boys. We get out pretty early."

"Gosh, I don't feel a bit like it, do you, Wes?"

"Naw, I'm too excited to think about it even. They say all those old pioneers like Kit Carson and

Uncle Dick Wooton hardly ever slept at all. They had to keep awake and watch for the Indians."

"Watcha talking about? They didn't watch for the Indians at all," he contradicted in a superior tone of voice.

"What did they do then, huh?"

"Went out and got 'em red-handed. They had to, because they were redskins, get me?"

"Do I get you? I'm way ahead of you."

"You score all right. You know what?"

"What?"

"I'd like to be a fireman on this road when I get older."

"Not me. I'd rather be the engineer. Why'd you like to be the fireman, Rip?"

"They got better chances of seeing what's going on while they're riding and the engineer has to keep his mind and eyes straight ahead."

"Gee, that's right." Westy was beginning to recognize the superior intelligence of his new friend and felt more kindliness toward him.

A few minutes after the porter entered, his arms occupied by various sizes and shapes of various colored shoes. Westy rose and Rip followed suit.

It lacked another minute before midnight would

open her portals to welcome the infant day, and still Westy lay wide-eyed in his berth, staring into the darkness. Rip's heavy breathing above him and the occasional light creak of the springs, betrayed the fact that Rip's sleep was by no means dreamless.

Wes listened intently as the wheels glided on in flight. Sometimes it gave him the sensation that they weren't in motion at all, for the roadbed was so smooth that the Limited annihilated the miles like a winged serpent.

They went over a crossing, for he could hear the bell as they passed tinkling its warning of danger to the unwary. Then all lapsed into silence again save the steady drowsy hum of the engine.

Yes, all was silent in the Pullman, too. Silent, except for the loud nasal chorus of those who would proclaim to the whole world their slumbering state. The porter, his cares laid aside for the time, was also contributing his bit in a minor key and at intervals he became very entertaining and shifted down to something that sounded like a bass note, but producing a weird echo like that of a rattlesnake dying. Westy was sure he preferred the minor key; it was much more comforting to hear.

He thought after a while that an hour or more

must have passed. His eyes burned for the want of sleep and his throat was awful dry. Poking his head through the curtain he ascertained whether there was any one about. Not a soul anywhere at either end. Good thing they had the end section; he wouldn't have to slip anything on. Padding out to the water cooler, he quenched his thirst hurriedly and got back in his berth again without encountering any one, and tried his luck at sleeping for the hundredth time.

Suddenly he felt an impact that fairly shook him in his berth. The emergency brake most likely, and in the next moment he knew he reasoned about right as the whole car seemed to throb and tremble before coming to a dead stop.

"Gee," he whispered softly to himself, lying with eyes wide and ears straining for some sound, "every one else but me must be unconscious if that didn't wake them."

Evidently no one had heard anything, nor were they aware of the stationary attitude of the train. The heavy breathing and loud snores continued uninterrupted as before.

Of course, it wasn't such an unusual thing for a fast train to stop suddenly out on the plains at night, nor anywhere else for that matter. But, he reasoned,

it was unusual for the emergency brake to be applied as it was and then stand as they did without even a whistle or warning of any kind.

Save for the patter of the falling rain there was a dead silence; not a human sound outside and yet that very silence was pregnant with danger.

Westy got up and dressed.

CHAPTER IV

A HERO BY CHANCE

It didn't take Westy half a minute to dress on that occasion, but it took him longer than that to rouse Rip, tug as he did at his bed clothes.

"Whassa matter, anyway?" His voice sounded startled.

"Shush!" warned Westy. "Get into your clothes quick as you can, 'n' don't make any noise."

That was sufficient to silence the quick-witted Rip and in a second he was lowering himself from his upper berth and down into the darkened aisle as noiselessly as a cat. Westy made a gesture indicating the need of utmost secrecy as to their next move and motioned Rip to follow him.

On the platform, Westy tried to open the door on the right side of the train, but couldn't seem to make the lever work. Then turning to the door on his left, he tried that and this time with success. They clambered down softly on the wet, soggy ground.

"I don't know at all what's the matter," Westy confided to Rip in guarded tones.

"Well, by heck! What did you drag me out here for?"

"We'll just go along easy and find out if there is anything wrong." He wasn't a bit perturbed at Rip's peevishness.

Rip mumbled something about Westy being a poor misguided nut and all the other classical phrases so useful in our present-day vernacular. Nevertheless, he plodded on after him, albeit a good deal sleepy.

They stole along in the dark and through the pelting rain, keeping close beside the cars. Their Pullman was first in line after the mail and baggage cars, so it did not take them long to walk the distance between.

Westy couldn't see a thing and, leading the way instinctively, held his arms out at length. Just as he could discern the dim outline of the engine ahead his outstretched hand came in contact with something. He stopped short as he heard the thud of a heavy object striking the soft, wet roadbed. Then to the surprise of both, they realized that another human being was also doing some sleuthing on his own and had muttered a low, almost unintelligible, curse.

"Aw right! I'm beat! Ya got me proper," came

the voice in true New York, east-side dialect. "Watcha going to do next, huh?"

Instinct and intuition probably prompted Westy's answer more than anything else. Or, it might have been that his foot kicked something at the same time when he stepped forward in the direction of the voice. At any rate, he stooped and picked it up.

"Hold 'em up!" Westy's voice commanded, sounding strange even to himself. Rip was holding his breath waiting for the next thing to happen, for he naturally thought that the deep hoarseness emanating from the throat of his comrade was a temporary bluff to make the east-sider believe his opponents were men. However, no one but Westy himself ever knew just what did cause this remarkable change and in view of subsequent happenings it wouldn't be fair to reveal anything further.

"Get around on the other side of the engine!" Westy commanded, determination ringing in his tones. "Walk ahead and don't look back once. I got you covered. D'ye get me?"

"Shure, I getcha," the captured one answered sullenly.

As they reached the head of the engine and stepped to cross and go around it, Westy and Rip

got a good view of their prisoner as he passed directly in the path of the powerful searchlight. A typical gunman he was, short of stature, but broad and stockily built, trudging obediently ahead.

These two boy scouts, fearless as they were, would not have meant so much as a feather in his ruffian hands had he but been aware of the extreme youth of his captors. They stepped quickly out of the light lest he should suddenly turn and discover how he was misled. But no, he led the way, groping in the darkness, and Westy felt perfectly confident that he would go on, blindly leading them to the source of the mystery.

Passing under the engine cab the boys could see it was empty, the fireman and engineer both gone. Obviously, there was foul play somewhere and Westy drew a deep breath to heighten his courage.

Nearing the second mail car, they perceived a chink of light shining through the aperture and the distinct hum of voices inside. At this juncture the boys both whispered a warning to their captive, Westy pushing the gun against his back.

"Tell them to open up, and if you let out one squeak——!" He left the sentence unfinished purposely.

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The gunman nodded assent and rapped his knuckles against the door. A subdued silence prevailed and then a shuffle of feet.

"Zat you, Bull?" came from behind the door.

"Yeh, 's me! Say——!"

Westy pushed the gun closer and Bull wriggled uncomfortably.

"Say, open up, will youse? I gotta put youse hip to sometin!"

As the door slid open slowly, throwing the light about the darkened area where they were standing, Westy and Rip jumped quickly and quietly back into the protecting shadows.

CHAPTER V

A STEP TO GLORY?

"THROW 'em down and out here quick!" Westy called out of the night.

Three guns immediately came tumbling out on the ground and within a few feet of each other. Their former owners were using violent language in deference to Bull and accusing him of being a stool pigeon, while he vainly protested his innocence.

Westy whispered something to Rip and resumed his authoritative manner.

"Get up there, you, Bull, and line up with the gang in the back of that car!"

Very submissively he ambled up and the gang obediently moved backward. Westy and Rip gathered up the guns hastily and fairly leaped inside the car, a revolver in each hand. Their captives gasped with astonishment, giving one another, particularly Bull, a look of total disgust.

The three mail clerks and the fireman and engineer, all bound and gagged, were sitting on the floor

in a row. They presented a pitiful yet humorous spectacle, sitting there in such dejected-looking attitudes.

Westy viewed the scene hurriedly. Mail was strewn about the whole car in their frenzy to get what they wanted and depart. He looked the line of gunmen over and picked out the biggest and toughest one of the lot.

"Hey, you big boy, step around and relieve those fellows of all that linen!"

There was a perceptible movement on the part of Bull just then to make a plunge at Westy, whose attention he thought was centered upon the big bandit cutting the ties that bound the victims. He moved no further than a foot, however, for the alert scout had pulled the trigger deftly and before any one realized what had happened, the bullet winged its way clean through the crown of Bull's brown fedora hat and landed straight in the niche that held the first-class mail for Larned.

"Score one for Uncle Jeb!" Westy said proudly. "It took me three weeks to learn that." It is needless to say that in view of his marksmanship no one had any desire to show him further resistance.

When the poor victims were released and before

they had sufficiently regained their composure, a conductor appeared on the scene, on his way to the engine to inquire the cause of delay. He immediately gave the alarm to the other train employees, taking care not to arouse the passengers.

Westy and Rip presented the guns to the perspiring clerks and during the excitement that followed with the bandits being securely placed under subjection, the boys slipped out unnoticed.

"Say, how do you get that way, Wes?" Rip's disappointment was evident.

"What way?"

"Why, skipping away like that just when things were warming up nice. You remind me of one of those birds who get up in the theater at the beginning of the last act and steps all over your feet in his frenzy to be the first one out. He don't want to see any more and he don't want you to see any more, either. One of those nice accommodating fellows. I always like to see the whole show, close-up and all!"

"So do I!"

"Well, Jumping Jiminy, why didn't you stay then?"

"Why, you half-baked ham, can't you guess?"

"No, I never was good at riddles. Why?"

"If your Uncle found out about this, the rest of the summer would be spoiled. Keep mum about it whatever you do!"

"Oh, I'll keep it under my hat all right, but he's sure to find it out somehow."

"How? We get off this train in a few hours, you simp! Neither the conductor on our car nor the porter saw us. They were just going in the mail car as we slipped out, for I watched closely. Mr. Wilde will hear about it, sure he will. But he couldn't prove it was us after we get off. We probably aren't the only two boys on this outfit."

"I get you on that point and of course I won't make a slip, but I can't see where it would be so awful if he did hear about it."

"You can't? All right! If you want to run around all summer encased in one of those little horsey reins with bells on like they put on boy babies to keep them from running away when they're first learning to walk, why we'll turn back right now and see the rest of the show. What do you say?"

"Not a darned thing!"

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

THE porter had given them two calls and each time Westy and Rip dozed off again. Then when they were within ten minutes of their destination, Mr. Wilde had to pull the bed clothes off to get them up.

"What are you kids thinking of, anyhow? Do you think the railroad's so kind-hearted as to allow their trains to stand at the station and give you time to leisurely dress before you get off. Railroads aren't run that way. We'll be in exactly nine minutes from now, so snap into it!"

When the two dilatory scouts collided over the same wash-basin four minutes later, the smoking room was filled with men talking loudly about a holdup on the mail car the night before.

Mr. Wilde and Billy were discussing it with the porter who was excitedly reciting the full details to his listeners.

Westy and Rip, employing tooth-brushes with unusual diligence, gave one another a very significant look. About Westy's right eye was the faintest suggestion of a wink. Three minutes later they were standing on the outer platform surrounded by their luggage and facing the door whose lever wouldn't work the night before, in the interests of Fate.

They were all mighty glad to get out in the open again under blue skies and warm sunshine, the air redolent of sweet smelling earth, moist from the heavy rains.

Their outfit was there to meet them, a big high-powered car and a trailer with all the camp equipment. While Mr. Wilde and Billy conferred with the driver of the car, Westy and Rip watched the train take the curve like a flash, and disappear, leaving nothing but a curl of smoke in its wake.

An hour or so later, speeding along a modernly paved highway, the scouts listened intently to Billy as he repeated the hold-up story to the driver.

"It's funny," commented Mr. Wilde, occupying the back seat with the scouts, "that not one of the conductors or porters thought to investigate the cause of the train stopping so abruptly."

"No," replied Billy, "it wasn't unusual at all, be-

cause the conductor on our car told me the train always stopped around there at that time to give Number Thirty the right of way. He said, of course, they hadn't been in the habit of stopping right there exactly—about two miles further on was the usual place. The fact that they had used the emergency brake didn't arouse any suspicion at first, on account of the storm. They thought perhaps the engineer had stopped on signal."

"Well, how did he come to stop at all?"

"The bandits, of course. They gave him the signal and naturally he stopped quick. He had not taken his hand off the throttle before the gunmen covered him and also the fireman. The other two had overpowered the mail clerks by the time their pals joined them. The reason they marched the fireman and engineer along to the car was the fear of discovery and the desire to keep all their victims together. Then the one acted as lookout and he had just about made his rounds of the entire train thinking all was well, when these two unknown kids came up in back of him on the left side of the engine.

"He told it himself, afterward, that he was stricken dumb; never even heard them. Thought it was a couple of the conductors all along until they

disarmed the whole bunch. Nervy kids all right, eh? Some thriller to have missed. Just my luck that I sleep so sound."

"Who were the kids?" Mr. Wilde asked placidly.

"They don't seem to know. During the excitement they must have slipped away unnoticed and no one was able to even give a good description of them. The conductor thought it might have been some one from the country around, but I doubt it on a stormy night like that."

"The site of old Fort Zarah just ahead, sir!" the driver addressed Mr. Wilde.

"Whew!" Westy was thankful for that interruption. He was glad that he had been thoughtful enough to close the door when they sneaked back to the car. He wondered if Rip was thinking the same thing, so he very deftly nudged him in the ribs with his elbow and presently the nudge was fully returned. Then they rode along in silence for a while admiring the country's beauty.

"Was any one hurt?" the driver inquired.

"No!" answered Billy pleasantly. "The fireman and engineer were pretty sore about the head. The bandits got real playful with them and knocked their heads a few times with the butts of the guns for get-

ting a little balky. The engineer said that was the third time they'd been held up in the course of a few years. Three times is one time too many, eh?"

"I should say," Mr. Wilde interrupted, and in the process of lighting another cigar, chuckled: "Quite a contrast in the type of these bandits from their predecessors of 'Forty-nine. They weren't even considerate enough then to leave them with a sore head. They were so greedy they took scalp and all along home to remember their victims by, they thought so much of them. Then in after years when amusements were hard to find and time hung heavy on their hands, they could look at these rare mementos of a bright, hilarious past and shake venerable beards in gestures betokening their great longing for the return of the good old days, when scalps could be had for the asking. No, sir, I can't for the life of me see what the engineer has to kick about at that. He ought to thank the present-day generation for turning out such nice, considerate gunmen."

They went on, passing hamlet after hamlet, town after town, and back into the open prairie again. A perfect summer day!

"I'd like to go into Unk's business," Rip said suddenly, "when I get older."

"How's that?" answered Westy. "I thought you said you'd like to be a fireman on the A. T. and S. F!"

"I thought I would at first, but I've changed my mind."

"Why?"

"Aw, because they have to work nights sometimes!"

CHAPTER VII

IMAGINATION

At the start Westy and Rip's interest was keenly aroused. They were stopping at places often and long enough to keep them from getting bored. Places that were rich in tradition failed to strike them very forcibly, it seemed. Helping out here and there it filled in time and they also posed at intervals to make the scenes abound with the human touch.

To boys craving adventure, it was just a daily routine of shooting scenes along a highway that occasionally ran through towns and hamlets of various sizes and descriptions. Nothing exciting about it, Westy mused. An old trail, it might have been once, but a plain, everyday, modern-looking highway now. Time had indeed spoiled everything for him, that was certain.

They had left the town of Great Bend in the distance after spending the morning there taking pictures of the Court House Square, through which place the Old Trail had run in its palmy days.

"What good does it do, Unk?" asked Rip, whose

thoughts were following the same trend as Westy's, "to take pictures like the one in Great Bend? How can people be interested in what's there now? They can't tell from that what the Old Trail really looked like. I know I couldn't."

"Do you know why you couldn't, Rip?"

"No. Why?"

"Because you lack one of the greatest assets or gifts, call it what you like, that life could possibly endow a human being with. That gift is commonly called Imagination."

"Each little hill and dell hereabouts"—Mr. Wilde swept his arms wide, indicating that he was taking the entire country surrounding them as an example—"has its own tale of adventure and romance to tell, if we have the mental capacity to draw out these tales from the dumb silence of their unspoken words and hidden secrets. A silence that reveals itself. Do you comprehend my meaning?

"Silence speaks only to those who are willing to listen. Imagination, if you want to call it such, but my theory is that any one who is highly spiritually attuned can hear the heart throbs in a pile of rock and detect the anguish in the tinkling murmur of a mountain brook.

"Why do people flock to see these pictures and landmarks that are but poor imitations of this once glorious Trail? Why? Because the sub-titles will inform them that on the site of what is now the Court House Square in the town of Great Bend the Old Trail ran through. And on that very spot occurred the terrible fight of Captains Booth and Hallowell in eighteen hundred and sixty-four. What happens? They absorb the seed and with plenty of fertility Imagination becomes a budding flower. That gift enables them to visualize from that peaceful picture another scene depicting a bloody encounter. Or, again, as the film unwinds a plateau is pictured with a herd of cows grazing and lying on its grassy slopes in the late twilight. That which was once famous as the battleground of a terrible conflict between the Pawnees and Cheyennes is now being used as a corral for cattle.

"Does that knowledge so lucidly pictured before them detract one bit from the glamor and charm that is Adventure and Romance and which even the ravages of Time cannot mellow?

"Not if they have imagination! Try it on your piano some time!"

CHAPTER VIII

A REAL FIND

MILE after mile they covered and still the snow-clad peaks of the Raton Range seemed as elusive as the will-o'-the-wisp.

The next morning, however, the outlines of the base became more perceptible as they drew nearer. At first sight it had a dark, grim look in the early morning light, a noticeable contrast to the green pastoral beauty of the foothills.

They were going to take some pictures of the summit and Mr. Wilde looked critically up at the crest that loomed before them now like a lighthouse in the heavens. He mentioned that they were going to foot it after they struck the base and they wouldn't be riding again for at least a couple of weeks.

That statement was very gratifying to the boys. They experienced a thrill in the freedom they would have roaming about at will for the first time since they started. In short, they sat up and took notice immediately.

To Westy the mountains and the smell of pine and the camp-fire at night were alluring. There never was bacon that tasted like the bacon fried over hot coals and no kitchen range ever boiled or percolated coffee as redolent as the coffee that was boiled in the Great Outdoors.

"Gee, it's a pip of a day!" Westy was full of enthusiastic anticipation.

"Yeh, could be much worse!" Rip said gloomily.

"Aw, quit the crêpe-hanging, Rip! We'll get a kick out of something if it's only one of the mules."

That afternoon they ascended the range and little by little the dark stretch of the base beneath them disappeared and the light seemed brighter with each forward step. Billy suggested that they look out for a good camping spot as they were reaching just about the right location to start out from each day and return to at night without having to move their stuff on all the time.

They were going along the main trail all the time and Westy mentioned that they would have to find a spot near a brook. Where else would they get their water? There was a little narrow path that ran between the thickly grown trees to their left. While Mr. Wilde and Billy were arguing about the

best place to stop, the true scout did a little scouting on his own and followed the path for a while. He wasn't walking more than five minutes when he came out to a place that had once been a clearing, but was now moss-grown and weedy. But joy of joys, there was an old dilapidated cabin with most of the windows broken, but seemingly a good substantial roof and a chimney that revealed the presence of an open fireplace within.

As he opened the creaking door whose hinges were thick in the rust of disuse, Westy realized that no human feet had crossed its threshold for many years past. A table of home-made manufacture stood in the center of the cabin and there were berths built on each side of the fireplace; four in all. Just made to order, Westy thought as he glanced through the broken window near the back. A brook was running merrily back of it about the distance of a long city block away. He hurried back to tell the news of his lucky find.

"I suppose you would never have come across that place if you weren't a scout," Mr. Wilde kidded him.

"A scout is observant!" Westy reminded him.

WESTY DECIDED TO DO THE COOKING AND LET RIP DO THE MENIAL CHORES.

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Westy Martin on the Santa Fe Trail.

CHAPTER IX

LOLA

"WELL, I'll say you are, anyway," Mr. Wilde said, as he viewed the place with a satisfied air. "It's like manna in the wilderness to get a bunking-in place like this. I never was fond of sleeping in damp tents and I'm too blamed old to acclimatize myself to that sort of thing now. Bless your lil heart, Westy, my lad, you have all the so-called mascots beaten by a mile when it comes to being of service!"

"A scout is helpful!" Westy said proudly.

"All right, then get some supper and show us what you can do!" Billy demanded, feigning seriousness.

Westy decided to do the cooking and let Rip do the menial chores about and so break him in right. He ordered Rip to run down to the brook and get some water. He sauntered on down very leisurely and splashed the cool water about for some time before he decided to return.

Just as he turned away from the brook to go back he felt instinctively the presence of some one

near him. Glancing around, he saw nothing. Then he looked upward and something moved in the refractory light shining through the gaunt-limbed trees. Breathless, he fled. His uncle sensed something amiss as he ran toward them.

"Gee, you know, Unk, strike me pink if I didn't see a girl sitting up in a tree down there. Looks to me like an Indian, s' help me Sam!"

"You're one heck of a scout, you are," Mr. Wilde chided him, "running away from a poor helpless Indian girl. What in thunder were you afraid of?"

"Aw, I wasn't afraid of her at all, I was just taken off my feet when I saw it was a girl. I don't like 'em much, anyway. That is, most of 'em!"

"Of course not," Mr. Wilde said with mock sympathy, and as an afterthought added, "Not until you get a little older! Come on, we'll take a stroll down and inquire who this maid of the mountains happens to be."

Westy left his bacon to an unknown Fate and followed the rest to the brook, where they beheld Rip's dryad sitting, feet under her, on the limb of a huge tree.

The setting sun threw a halo of scarlet around her. Bobbed hair, dark and straight, with a band of crim-

son ribbon encircling her forehead. Eyes as dark as the forests at night with a laughing light in them. Her small face and strong looking arms were tanned. They could see at first glance that here was a child of the open spaces.

A girl of about thirteen, they judged, when she slipped out of the tree as noiselessly as a wildcat and stood before them slim and tall for her age.

One *would* gather at first that she was an Indian, until she smiled at them one and all, sweetly yet fearlessly.

"How do you do!" Mr. Wilde said, as he bowed graciously. "My name is Madison Wilde, young lady! Who, may I ask, are you?"

She laughed gayly at Mr. Wilde's mock gallantry, and her voice echoed like a silver bell ringing throughout the forest.

"Why—I'm a girl called Lola!"

CHAPTER X

ON THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

"So you're Lola, are you, and not some ephemeral wood-sprite that disappears with the advent of dawn? I feel disappointed that you cannot truthfully tell me you're home is the trunk of the tree and that you sip the nectar from the flowers as your sole diet. Now that you're really a human being we will have to make the best of it. I suppose you live near here?"

She pointed a slim brown finger southward where a column of smoke was curling high above the clump of evergreen pines and tall straight cedars beyond.

"I wonder," she said, showing two rows of even white teeth, "if you gentlemen would take supper with us?" Manifestly, this was inclusive of all.

With all her feminine sweetness there was nothing coy about her nor her question. She spoke simply but with an amazing frankness, accentuated by the soft deep tones in her voice. A typical tomboy, Mr. Wilde thought.

Westy and Rip liked her at once and the fact that she included them as gentlemen had a marked effect upon this consideration.

"Now, that's kind of you," Mr. Wilde answered, "but we are all pretty tired to-night. We wouldn't make very sociable guests I'm afraid. Besides, the hour is quite late now and for four men to presume upon your mother's kind hospitality would be too much of a good thing."

"Oh, no, not at all. I live alone with my grandmother, my father and mother are dead. It's such a holiday when we have any visitors—it happens so very seldom." She said it with a wistful sadness that touched them. "Are you camping here long?"

"Two weeks at the most. Perhaps we will take advantage of your invitation to-morrow evening if we are still welcome!"

"By all means, Mr. Wilde." She moved away from the spot and extended her hand to each one in turn, acknowledging the introductions. "Our cabin is off the main trail; take the first path to the left. If you could make it in the afternoon I could show you some interesting views for your pictures. Good evening, gentlemen!"

They answered in chorus as she took the path

through the trees, walking erect with long, graceful strides. Just before disappearing around the bend she turned and waved a hearty farewell.

"Gee, that's what I call a regular girl," Rip exploded. "Not pretty, but straight from the shoulder."

"I'll say," Westy exclaimed. "She'd certainly knock the spots out of Bridgeboro's dumb Doras."

"Well, are you kids going to stand there gassing all night while I'm starving to death? Come on with the feed!" This was from Billy, who looked upon life as a continual unwinding of film, interrupted only by the process of eating and sleeping.

Late that night, under a moon not quite full, they sat outside talking over the events of the day.

"I say, Mr. Wilde, how did that girl know about your pictures?"

"I don't know, Westy. It would seem uncanny—her knowing that, only I have a faint idea she saw us before we saw her. Probably when we were unloading our stuff. I hadn't any idea of a human being living around here. Of course, it's perfectly delightful, but inaccessible. I dare say it must be dreadfully lonely for such a spirited girl as she."

About midafternoon of the next day they set out

for Lola's cabin. It was a longer hike than they thought, judging from the distance they had reckoned where the smoke was curling the previous evening.

Presently a clearing appeared just ahead and, reaching it, they beheld the "cabin" as she called it, but really a little cottage, painted white with green trimmings and embowered in flowers of variegated hue. Truly a veritable little paradise in the heart of the mountains.

So sequestered, so cool and peaceful it stood there, with the brook to one side bubbling its hurried way as its crystal waters glistened and sparkled in the sunlight.

Running back of the cottage to the south, the ground ended abruptly in a jagged ledge of rock that looked down into a deep ravine from its dizzy heights.

"I told Grandmother one time that at least we have the distinction of living on the edge of the world!" Lola had come out of the house quietly and noting their evident abstraction in the awe-inspiring depths of the ravine, she had spoken—their very thoughts.

Unconsciously, Westy had made that deduction.

On the edge of the world! Indeed it was, for the formidable-looking chasm with the mountains rising ever higher to the south seemed to separate the little cottage in its realms of imagination from the world of reality beyond!

CHAPTER XI

MANY YEARS AGO

In this everyday world of ours, what with the rapid strides that civilization has taken in every direction and the progress of our own generation, we have become cynical and apathetic regarding the ingenuity of mankind.

This fact was never brought to mind so much as on that Sunday afternoon when Westy got his first glimpse of Lola's home. It must represent the love and labor of three quarters of a century and more, he thought, to attain such a triumph against such odds. How these sturdy people had outwitted stubborn Nature, to have made this paradise possible in a wilderness, when all the soil surrounding it even now seemed unwilling to give sustenance to anything save a few hardy trees and lifeless mosses. It was astounding and worthy of praise.

A little arbor had been built to one side of the house and it was here that Lola entertained them. At length her grandmother appeared, Lola introducing her as Mrs. Redmond.

Mr. Wilde could not help noticing that in spite of her simple costume she was a woman of marked aristocratic bearing, welcoming them all in the same soft, deep voice as her granddaughter.

Their hospitality was overwhelming, and in spite of the plainness of the food served at supper, the sweetness and wholesomeness of the two lonely creatures made the meal taste like a king's feast.

Their eager interest about everything in the world outside was pathetic. They encouraged Mr. Wilde and Billy to talk of their work and listened attentively to Westy and Rip talk of the scouts. It was obvious that they did not want to talk of themselves at all, mentioning nothing of their own daily lives and routine.

Westy's heart was filled with pity as he watched Lola's dark eyes widening with interest as she listened to the desultory conversation around the table. She fairly gurgled with delight at times when little touches of humor were added here and there. It was a meal that none of them ever forgot.

After supper was over, the night being so warm, it was suggested that they go outside. The air was heavy with the scent of the flowers and the crooning hum of all the mountain night folk had begun.

Lola and the boys flopped themselves in the cool, thick grass at the feet of the older folks who were sitting in the rough-hewn chairs, bearing all the earmarks of true pioneer handicraft.

"I say, Miss Lola," Westy said suddenly, breaking the spell, "are there any Indians in these woods? The honest-to-goodness kind, I mean!"

He wasn't sure, but Westy imagined that he saw Lola startle at his question and in the faint light from the rising moon he detected a bright flush on her cheeks. Glancing at Mrs. Redmond, he saw that she also wore that same strange look. But then in the next moment Lola seemed to have regained her poise, for she smiled—perhaps a trifle sadly, he thought.

"You must remember, Westy, the red man no longer roams the mountain forests at will, nor does he fish in the streams unmolested that were once his by the divine right of Providence. The government sees to it that the Indian makes his home where the white man wishes him to make his home. They are now herded together, these once proud red men, like cattle and their freedom is as limited. The white man has wished it so!"

To say that they were startled at this speech from

so young a girl was putting it mildly. They were amazed and no one missed the bitterness that infused her outburst.

"Gee, I know, you sure are right—there, Miss Lola," Westy said sympathetically. "I've always thought it a darn shame to coup them up. They wouldn't do any harm now, that's a cinch!"

"I have often wondered myself," Mr. Wilde put in, "wherein the fault did really lie in the beginning. It is true after all I suppose that the white man has been more or less of a thief, too. He took away their land at the start and then snatched from them the very birthright of every red man—his freedom. It is a fact to be deplored by the white man, really!"

Both Lola and her grandmother seemed to be looking back into the past, so grave were they in their meditation.

"Would you like to hear a long story, gentlemen?" Lola said inquiringly.

The very silence spoke consent.

In the realms of imagination they sat, waiting for Lola to begin. The moon broke full through the dark, star-flecked heavens as an elfin breeze stirred the sleeping flowers, wafting their heavy languorous perfume through the air. The cry of some dis-

tant night-prowler pierced the stillness and she looked away where the black shadows hid the deep ravine from view. With her face uplifted to the moonlight, her lips parted slowly:

"Many years ago——"

CHAPTER XII

JUST A FEW

"WHEN the Moon of the Snow Shoes had come upon the prairies, the North Wind, cruel and merciless, blew its stinging fury in the faces of the red men. Ice and snow covered the earth, spreading itself like a huge blanket.

"Months passed and still no sunrise nor sunset could penetrate the frozen ground beneath its icy coverlet. The moon and stars each night looked down upon a silent, shivering world.

"The owl in the forest, the birds from the northland; all living things were rendered inanimate by the wrath of the Ice-god who ruled the plains that winter.

"When the early spring should have caused the sap to run in the trees, making ready to burst forth the tiny buds, still nothing stirred. Even the sun was implacable, withholding its warmth and brightness from the pleading earth.

"Day was as night, with the dark clouds hiding

the blue of the heavens and the mantle of white still draping the whole world beneath.

"Death, stark and grim, hovered over the wigwams of the red men and the cabins of the white man. Suffering, sorrow and hunger were everywhere, recognizing no creeds nor classes.

"Then, when the spring was late and his purpose accomplished, this harbinger of all that was Misery and Gloom, stole subtly away into the night, giving way to a day that brought sunshine and new hope.

"On that day a band of braves were returning to the lands of their fathers', having wearied of waiting for the ice to break and had ventured forth to hunt. Turning back with much rejoicing and provisions, they hurried homeward. Thankful, they were, these warriors of the Cheyennes, that the God of the Sun was shining once more upon their people.

"Their leader, in the course of their journey, sighted a lone tepee standing in the heart of the prairie wilderness.

"Bold and brave though they were, the scene that they beheld upon entering the wigwam caused them great anguish. A scene of past suffering and desolation it had been.

"In the center of the lone tepee sat an Indian chief

attired in his full splendor. Kneeling, as in an attitude of prayer, his squaw, her head resting in his lap and her hands clasped before her, was found. They had either frozen or starved to death.

"While deploring this tragedy, they heard a faint cry and found a tiny cradle with a girl babe inside, just on the borderland. They fought for many hours to keep the spark kindled, and after hope was almost gone—it came back—to live.

"With due ceremony the babe's royal father and mother were started on the way to the Happy Hunting Grounds and the braves set out again with the tiny princess, bearing it tenderly home.

"The whole tribe came out to welcome this little daughter of an unknown chief and she was given to Black Waters, tribal chief and very powerful.

"A feast, very joyful, was held that night and the girl babe was named in honor of her finding—alone with Death.

"Lone Star, they called the babe, and she, gentlemen, was my great-grandmother!"

CHAPTER XIII

PAGES

"THE years went by swiftly and Lone Star grew into girlhood. Adored by her foster father and his squaw, Singing Bird, her precocious wisdom soon made itself manifest among the tribe.

"Peace-loving, gentle and tolerant, Lone Star exercised great influence over Black Waters, and the Cheyennes lived many, many moons contented and at peace with even their hereditary enemies.

"Under her tuition a plea was sent to the white man by Black Waters, asking them not to entice their warriors with fire-water. On the whole, this plea was respected except by those unprincipled enough to make use of the Indians' ignorance when their brains were befuddled with liquor. Braves were prohibited from indulging and to those whose behavior lapsed from this rule, punishment was meted accordingly.

"The Cheyennes were not inherently peace-loving and a time came when they chafed under their sub-

jection and longed for war paint and feathers again.

"Lone Star's serenity was a source of bitterness to the restless braves. Their dislike for her deepened into hate, but they dared not voice this openly in fear of incurring Black Waters' wrath.

"Young maidenhood found her the virtual ruler of the tribe. Black Waters was getting quite feeble in body, but nevertheless still strong in mind. Then one day when Singing Bird and Lone Star were absent a tragedy occurred.

"Black Waters was slain by some mysterious enemy, a poisoned arrow having found its way into the heart that had known such great love for the waif of the prairies.

"Her grief was unappeasable and with Black Waters' squaw she went into seclusion for a time.

"A new chief was ruling the domain upon Lone Star's return. Ruling it contrary to all that she had taught them in her labors of love; for she had grown to love the people of her adoption.

"She and Singing Bird were given a new tepee, but a very cold welcome. It was alongside that of the new ruler, and one evening as she sat outside in the shadows, quite accidentally she overheard a plot. It was being discussed between some braves and the

Chief himself who were obviously victims of the white man's fire-water.

"The plan was to rob the stage coach on its regular run to Santa Fe. One of the tribe had secured the information and reported to his chief that much loot would be secured if the attack was carried out successfully.

"Lone Star deplored this and straightway entered the wigwam, protesting against breaking the long period of peace that they all had shared. Her pleading was all in vain and she was immediately made a prisoner in her own wigwam to prevent any further recurrence of intruding into their affairs. It was understood that she wasn't to have her freedom until the robbery was over.

"The next morning, goaded on by the highly spirited alcohol, the warriors set forth at dawn for the Old Santa Fe Trail to await their victims at Old Point of Rocks.

"The next day went by and then as the last red glow of evening gave way to the night they returned, victorious and triumphant, bringing with them the fruits of the victory and two male prisoners.

"They were both young men who had been successful in gold mining and on their way to visit in

Santa Fe. That they had been saved was due to the unusual bravery displayed by the one—an English gentleman. The fact that the other was his dearest friend and partner saved him also. The red man, admiring bravery more than a life, spared them and brought them back to their tribe for further consultation.

"The chief, a man inclined to malevolence and also wishing to taunt her, demanded that Lone Star come forth to view his prisoners.

"Head erect and eyes flashing proudly, she came. Tossing her raven hair defiantly, she faced them one and all and then glanced at the captives with pity.

"As her eyes met those of the Englishman, the shadows of her life seemed to steal away—for in the light of his eyes was the Light of the World.

"The Englishman, gentlemen, was John Redmond, my great-grandfather!"

CHAPTER XIV

OUT

"THE days and nights that followed were a period of torment, not only to the white men, but to Lone Star also as a result of her open display of pity for them. She was forced daily to witness certain forms of torture inflicted upon the prisoners.

"John Redmond bore these tortures without flinching, even daring to smile between times upon Lone Star's anguished face, as if to reassure her that it was nothing. Paul Mitchell, his friend and partner, was not quite as resolute in bearing these inflicted sufferings. Each new trend these tortures were taking seemed but to increase his anger and resentment toward the Indian maiden. He hated the warriors that were enjoying his pain, but most of all he hated her for having been the direct cause which instigated the red men in these deeds.

"After some days Lone Star learned from Singing Bird that in order to punish her completely the Cheyennes were going to put the young men to

death in her presence on the dawn of a certain day.

"Thereupon a plan was made and late that night she succeeded in getting one of the boys who was guarding the prisoners to allow her to go in the wigwam on the pretense that she wished to give them some food.

"Her ruse was successful and she revealed to them how she intended to help them escape. Redmond was overjoyed and admired her daring. Mitchell also was thankful in the anticipation of his freedom, but viewed with disfavor the attachment between his friend and the Indian maid. Notwithstanding that she was risking her own life in helping him, too, he never lost his resentment for her and as long as he lived he didn't even try to forgive or forget.

"As the time approached when they were to escape, Redmond mentioned that he intended carrying Lone Star off with them. Mitchell was terribly angered on hearing this, but to all his pleas his friend turned a deaf ear.

"In the dark of a moonless night, Lone Star and Singing Bird waited for them with their ponies, at a place not far from the Indian camp. The discovery of the young men's escape they knew would be made just about the time the two women were re-

turning and that, of course, would mean exposure and certain death for them. So they valiantly determined to flee after the white men had gotten safely away. They would outlaw themselves rather than return to their people as traitors—and Death.

"A sound of dried leaves being trod upon warned them that Redmond and Mitchell were safe from their enemies—so far. Then they appeared through the trees.

"Without a word being spoken, the women motioned the young men to mount quickly as time fled. And then Redmond with an imperious gesture demanded Lone Star to mount the pony with Mitchell, for which act this gentleman straightway swore to retaliate.

"Singing Bird and Redmond on the other pony led the way to freedom and struck out for the Old Santa Fe Trail, and before the sun had set that evening they had put great distance between their enemies and themselves.

"They stopped to rest for the night, feeling sure of being safe from any pursuers. While Redmond went to a near-by stream and got some fish for the evening meal, Mitchell, with malice hidden under his smiling countenance, gravely told Lone Star

that John Redmond had secreted upon his person a paper that represented great wealth. He told her that in the event of encountering another attack or robbery it would be safer in his interests for her to have it. If she cared about his safety, he told her, she would manage to get it that very night while he slept and hide it under the bright band that held her thick hair in place. If she wanted to save him from any more robberies like the one her people had just perpetrated upon them, this act would save him.

"In the depths of her trusting heart she believed him, and that night accomplished her purpose, thinking it a deed of much loyalty.

"When the dawn came, penciling the gray horizon with streaks of pinkish hue, Lone Star awakened to find her beloved Singing Bird ill and suffering intensely. Awakening Redmond, they both discovered that Mitchell was nowhere about. Thinking he had gone to the spring to refresh himself, they awaited his return.

"A half hour, then an hour, elapsed and still no sign of him anywhere. Becoming alarmed, they hurried to the spot where the ponies had been tied the evening before. Where they had left two ponies

grazing contentedly in the lingering summer twilight, there was now only one.

"John Redmond uttered a cry of bewilderment and the truth of the matter came vividly to Lone Star as she raised her hand to her forehead.

"The paper was gone!"

CHAPTER XV

OF THE PAST

LOLA had evidently finished her tale. She still sat unmoved, hands clasped idly in her lap and staring out into blank space. Her physical being was there, living and breathing the same as they, but Westy thought that her spirit was somewhere in the Great Beyond with Lone Star.

"My dear child," Mr. Wilde said finally, "we are waiting to hear the rest of your story. You've left the best part untold, haven't you?"

"You mean the hardest part," she answered; "for them, at least it must have been! There isn't much more to tell except that Lone Star confessed to John Redmond her innocent theft and how Paul Mitchell had duped her.

"Singing Bird being in such a precarious condition and with only one pony, their progress was exceedingly slow. All along the way their dangers were manifold and one day a stage coach overtook them. They were overjoyed, of course, but their joy was

short lived, as there wasn't any available room for them.

"One of the occupants was a padre from the mission in Santa Fe, so on the Old Trail right at the threshold of the mountains which had become hallowed with the blood and martyrdom of many brave men, Lone Star and John Redmond joined their hearts and hands.

"The passengers did all they could for Singing Bird and, being helpless to do more, went on their way. Putting the old woman on the pony's back, this fearless maid and man stood for a moment watching.

"Hands tightly clasped, they looked where the coach was disappearing around a bend in the Trail. When they couldn't see it longer, they listened, the pounding of the horses' hoofs resounding along the highway and the friendly creak of the wheels sounding like music to their ears. On and on they went, riding into the sunset and out of their lives.

"Singing Bird died when they reached these mountains. In searching for a place to give her burial they came across a deserted cabin standing where our cottage is now.

"Whether it was that they were weary or disillu-

sioned and skeptical of all mankind through Paul Mitchell's act, I do not know. At all events they decided to live their lives alone and unmolested, and stayed on here, enduring terrible hardships in their endeavors to make possible this little garden spot as a retreat from all the world.

"One son was born to them, who afterward married an English girl, his second cousin, and now my grandmother. They also stayed on here with the parents and in the due course of time a son was born to them—my father.

"In his young manhood he brought to the home of his fathers' a young bride of gentle bearing whose forefathers had also fought and triumphed over great odds on the Old Trail.

"They, too, stayed on, building the old cabin anew and at my birth my mother died. My father was deeply grieved and when the war came he went to France—never to return. Like his grandfather who had lived bravely—he died bravely.

"John Redmond and Lone Star passed out of this life within a few minutes of one another—loyal even unto Death. Unhappily, I do not remember them; they died when I was an infant.

"After my father's death in France my grand-

father also left this life and they are all lying peacefully over there on the hillside."

She waved her hand to the right, where four little white stones on a grassy slope stood out visibly in the bright moonlight.

"Just grandmother and I now—that is all, dear friends, for you have just heard a tale of three generations."

CHAPTER XVI

THOUGHTS

LATE that night when they got back to the little shack every one was sleepy enough to turn in. Long after Mr. Wilde and Billy had entered the somnolent state, Westy and Rip lay wide awake, eyes boring the darkness, and thinking.

Lola's story had deeply affected them all, but in the boys it had so stimulated their interest that they lay pondering the whole thing as she told it from beginning to end. Westy had a thought and he just couldn't keep it until morning.

"Hey, Rip, watcha doing?" he said softly.

"Pickin' flowers in the Sahara!"

"Say, now, I'm serious!"

"You always are. What in heck do you want now?"

"I've just been thinking——"

"You don't do anything but think. I don't see that it gets you anywhere. Look at those bandits, for instance——"

"Shush! Are you out of your mind?"

"Don't shush me! Anyhow, do you think I'm a boob? If you did something else besides thinking you'd a-heard. Unk and Billy sound like a couple of steam shovels already. They can't hear!"

"All right, but there's no use of spilling the beans now and crying the blues, too. We can't get credit for everything, can we?"

"No, you won long before you started."

"What I started to tell you was: Do you think there's been a part of Lola's story left out? On purpose, I mean!"

"How do I know! I'm not a mind reader."

"Well, I'm convinced there was."

"Yes?"

"Of course. Do you remember her telling about that Mitchell chap?"

"Yeh, what about him?"

"Well, she never said what became of him, nor if they ever tried to locate him. It would be interesting to know where he went. He certainly must have copped all the gold that belonged to Redmond. Didn't she say something about the paper representing great wealth?"

"Sure!" Rip was getting very drowsy and half heard Westy's question.

"Well, there you are. He must have had half interest with that Mitchell in the mine. A gold mine! Think of it! Gee, they ought to be rich, eh, Rip?"

"Sure! Huh!"

"But they're not! That's where the mystery of it comes in. They must be terribly poor or they wouldn't be living that way. Lola talks well—but then her grandmother educated her most likely. I can't get it out of my head that there's a nigger in the woodpile somewhere. Gee, I'd like to get up the courage to ask her what else she knows, wouldn't you?"

There was a protracted silence and when Rip did answer it seemed to come from afar.

"Sh-sh-ure!"

"Can't you say anything but *sure?*"

"Sure! Good-night!"

CHAPTER XVII

A LAKE BEWITCHED

THE next morning early, the Educational Film squad set out early to meet Lola, who had promised to show them some of the beauties of Raton Range that no one but a native of the mountains would be cognizant of.

Lola, Westy and Rip walked ahead chatting gayly. Up narrow paths they went single file. Paths that were partially hidden with underbrush and had felt the tread of many generations of mankind, both red and white, were now overgrown from disuse.

Above them the barren-coned peaks rose high into the cloudless blue, and the weird-shaped forms stood like sentinels guarding the miles of untracked mountain wilderness.

After lunch Lola led the way out of a narrow ravine, up ever higher, and thence out on a broad terrace. Brilliant Alpine plants and flaming cactus were growing in profusion, and further on they came to a lake gleaming like a mirror in the afternoon sun.

On all three sides of it were towering cliffs covered with pine and great piles of gray rock.

On one side of the lake, directly opposite them, straight upwards from the water's edge, a cliff was indented in places like a narrow stairway and ended abruptly in what looked to be a depression from where they stood. It attracted the onlooker at once by virtue of this peculiarity.

Where the other cliffs had piled their growth of rock until they seemed to merge themselves with the white-capped crest of the Range this one resembled a dwarfed step-sister, stunted and despised by its loftier kin.

The younger members of the party sat down at the edge of the lake, while Billy and Mr. Wilde maneuvered around for some good scenes. Then they went back a way to the broad terrace and left them to their own interests for awhile.

Rip was talking loudly and skipping some stones in the lake. It was this that Westy thought at first made the sounds he was hearing. But he heard it again, and again, whenever Rip lowered his voice or when Lola answered.

"What's that noise, I wonder?"

"What noise?" Rip inquired.

"I don't know what it is, that's why I'm asking you. Can't you hear it?"

"No! You're crazy!"

"Well, quit talking for five minutes and you'll hear some sounds besides your own!"

They all sat quiet for a few minutes and it came again; a sound like thousands of bees droning their delight in a world overflowing with nectar. Sometimes it would gradually lessen and die away slowly against the rock-ribbed cliffs, like the finale of an organ's peal, echoing and reëchoing in the dim recesses of an old cathedral. Then it would start again, the same as before. It was weird.

Westy looked to Lola, a question half formed on his lips. She was smiling.

"What's the joke?"

"I forgot to mention it before," she said simply.

"What?"

"Only that there's a legend connected with this place. The lake supposedly is bewitched and the stunted cliff you see up there is haunted!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LEGEND OF DEATH RIVER

"Aw, go on!" gasped the skeptical Rip. "Who says it's haunted?"

"I don't know who started it," Lola answered complacently, "but people around here have believed it for many hundreds of years. I could neither deny nor affirm it, never having been in or on the lake or up there."

The romantic and adventurous Westy was thrilled to the utmost. He had fairly hung on Lola's every word.

"If they say it is, *it is!*" he cried with emphasis, and believed it because he wanted to believe it.

"Well, maybe it is, but you've got to go some to make me believe it, I know that!" Rip was defiant. "Anyhow, if it's only a legend, why should we have to swallow it? People in those days were likely to believe everything. They didn't have anything else on their minds! Why, gee whiz, look at those times

when the poor dubs practiced witchcraft. Would you believe that now? Huh, I guess not! Then why fall for this kind of stuff? Not a bit of difference between witchcraft and haunted places. It's all bunk!" Rip was panting for breath.

"Mr. Smarty!" Westy put in, "I hope you're resting easier with that off your chest! And I'll tell you one thing, if you call yourself a gentleman, I don't! Arguing with a lady—you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Weren't you brought up to believe everything a lady tells you? and if you don't to keep it to yourself? That's the way I was brought up! Now can the chin music until Lola tells us what it's all about. Go on, Lola!"

"Lone Star told it to my grandmother," she began. "All the old pioneers hereabouts know of it. In fact it had been handed down generation after generation until Black Waters' time and that is how my Indian kin learned it. Of course, they all believe it implicitly—but that is ill to the purpose just now. The story is what you want to hear.

"Ages ago, as we have all been told, the continent of North America was vastly populated by the red man. Whether of the Aztec race or not, it is not known, but at any rate the tribe I am going to tell

you about were cliff dwellers and said to be very intelligent in their way.

"The lake here was then a deep, dangerous river called the River of Death or Death River. It was fed by a gigantic waterfall that came roaring over one of the cliffs yonder. The stream then ran on submerging each little stream in its swift, greedy course. It wanted no tributaries emptying mild waters in its superstrong current. It wanted only itself; its own master and any of those who dared defile these virgin waters were put to death and violently carried downstream and from there emptied into an enormous basin, where the bodies of those who had also dared were devoured by huge fish. That basin is now called Le Purgatoire (The River of Lost Souls) or Purgatory River. Many legends are also told of that river.

"At any rate, the stunted cliff was occupied by this tribe whose homes had been chiseled out of the rock. It was higher then than any of the neighboring cliffs and for many, many years they lived there in peace and prosperity.

"The men were stalwart and handsome and their women folk were reputed far and wide to possess extraordinary beauty and grace. Their braves were

lacking however in one thing—prowess in war. They weren't as skillful with the bow and arrow as their contemporaries who roved the plains.

"But their lives were serene. They hunted and fished; their homes were strong and comfortable and they had the River of Death flowing past their very doors to protect them from envious invaders.

"It was true, an enemy could reach them by the long and tortuous trails over the range. But the way was dangerous and would take many moons to travel, so they did not fear this as they well knew the laziness of their brother redskins, who would avoid such a route if they could reach and fight them another way. They preferred paddling their canoes in comfort to stalking over hazardous trails.

"A day came, however, when a distant tribe heard of the serenity, the prosperity and beautiful maidenhood this tribe possessed. This distant tribe were noted for their great skill with the arrow and it was said they could slay a deer on the mountain, aiming from the prairie land below. So the cliff dwellers with their Death River and all could not deter them from setting out to fight them.

"They were tired of their prairie wigwams, exposed to the wintry blasts and the summer suns.

They wanted comfort and determined to take the homes of the cliff dwellers for their own.

"Upon reaching the banks of the River, they called forth a challenge to the warriors of the cliffs. Now, though not skilled in archery, these braves were not cowards and at once answered the challenge of their enemies. The women and children clambered to the top of the cliff and hid back in the safe seclusion of the deep forest.

"Alas, the handsome men of the peaceful tribe were no match for the enemy, who were indescribably ugly and ferocious. After a few days and much fighting between the river's bank and the cliffs, a sunset found them all completely wiped out—victims of the treacherous poisoned arrows of their opponents, who were now shouting with malicious glee the songs of triumph.

"The women and maidens hearing no more shouts from their loved ones came to the edge of the cliff and straightway were weighed down with terrible sorrow. Before their very eyes their braves were being rushed face downward in the terrific currents of Death River, while others had fallen by their own dwellings, which they had fought to protect.

"The enemy tribe then called them to prepare the

homes anew, for they intended to seize the women also. They were going to take the trail over the range, knowing the dangers of the river.

"The women and maidens, aware of the length of time it took to cross the range, set about destroying their possessions. Arising before dawn on the morning that the enemy's arrival was expected, they arrayed themselves in their most beautiful costumes.

"When all were assembled (some two hundred and more) the oldest woman of the tribe began to chant a hymn of death. It was taken up along the line by the older women first, the mothers with their babes and children, the maidens and girls and boys.

"Filled with pathos, the last wailing note lingered long in the air and finally died away in the roaring din of the waterfall. Paying their last homage to the four gods of their fathers, the heavens above, the earth below, the winds and the sea, they cried a prayer of farewell.

"As the approaching dawn flooded the world in a sea of light and as the sun looked silently on, with one accord they flung themselves into the rushing waters below!"

CHAPTER XIX

RIP MAKES HIMSELF HEARD

"SHUT up!" Westy said vehemently and looked meaningly at Rip when Lola paused in her narrative.

"What are you chirping about, Birdie?" Rip came back, surprised. "I didn't say a word yet!"

"Well, you were going to and you can thank me now that you didn't!"

"I'll be darned!" was all that Rip could find suitable to say.

"Do you promise not to quarrel again—either of you, if I finish?" Lola sounded serious.

"Sure, we do!"

"When the enemy reached the cliff that had been so precipitous, their amazement knew no bounds to see that it had been reduced to half its former size and the cliff dwellings a mass of solid gray rock, as if they had never been there at all. Running all the way down to the water's edge, a series of indentations had been formed as if chiseled by a human hand.

"All was as silent and still as the tomb. The great waterfall rushing over the cliff to the west had disappeared as well and the rocky surface that had been wet with the spray for ages was now bone dry in the hot sun.

"Beneath, where the river had swirled and eddied and flowed on as far as the eye could see, was now a small, placid mountain lake, and they sought to penetrate (with their bewildered eyes) all this mystery in its mirror-like depths.

"For *there is mystery* in its depths, say what you like. Looking at its calm surface, you are vastly deceived, because it is said that there are no end of little whirlpools underneath that suck one down to the bottomless depths. Fish cannot live in it; I have seen that proven, and the water is almost hot at times. A singular thing, you know, for a mountain lake."

Westy nodded, eyes wide with wonderment, but Rip, as was to be expected, hadn't flopped entirely yet.

"All right, Lola! So far I don't say I do believe and I don't say I don't." Rip was at least trying to keep within the law governing the status of a gentleman. "What I want to know is, what has

that to do with the whole blooming outfit being haunted?"

"This is where that part comes in," Lola said, quite undaunted. "When the Indian women chanted their death hymn they invoked the God of the Waterfall to punish the enemy tribe for the willful destruction of their braves. Also, they called upon the God of the Forest to make its depths so impenetrable that the cruel redmen would become lost and never find their way out.

"There was a landslide of rock that obliterated the dwellings, after the wholesale sacrifice had been made. And, the forest god, coöperating with the God of the Waterfall, ingeniously devised the natural stairway to entice the warriors down to cross the lake, whose waters became warm to make the snare more alluring.

"Those of the enemy who didn't drown in the lake, which the waterfall is now supposed to be hiding beneath, became lost and died in the jungle that had grown on the cliffs. That forest there is also said to be infested with snakes.

"And so to this day, boys, no man dares entrust himself to the warm waters of the lake, or dares to traverse the forest fastnesses with impunity!"

"Huh!" exclaimed Rip with perfect self-assurance. "I'd like to see any one stop me if I wanted to go!"

"My dear Rip," explained Lola, "I certainly wouldn't try to stop you, but at the same time I surely wouldn't urge you. In all my family history we have known no man who would think of attempting it and I am proud to say they weren't cowards, either. I guess it was that they had enough trouble without going to seek for it."

"Oh, don't listen to him, Lola! He says more than his prayers!" Westy assured her.

"I do, do I?" Rip was plainly aroused.

"Sure!"

"Well, what would you say if I told you I was going in that lake for a darn good swim to-morrow?"

"I'd say you were just a poor nut, and that if you did, it'd be your own funeral!"

CHAPTER XX

SHADOWS OF DOUBT

On the way home it was pretty plain that Rip was peeved at Westy. He said nothing to either of them and when they left Lola at her cabin he said good-night with the rest, but didn't speak again the rest of the way to their own little shack. There seemed to be a tacit understanding between them, too, that nothing but silence should prevail.

Mr. Wilde and Billy were dog-tired after a long strenuous day, and they were too engrossed in their own affairs to notice anything amiss with the boys. So Westy decided not to mention anything of the haunted cliff and lake that evening.

Rip immediately went to his bunk and pretty soon they all followed suit. As Westy lay in his bunk thinking of his comrade's foolish statement, he heard the cries of a wildcat not far off. Then an owl hooted dismally in the distance and soon he felt the warm delicious drowsiness of sleep enveloping him like a cloak, protecting his senses from the disturbing night noises.

When he arose in the morning every one was up and about. In fact, the faithful Billy and Mr. Wilde bore all the evidences of readiness for departure.

"Say, Westy," Mr. Wilde said on seeing him up, "I didn't call you because there's no hurry for you two kids this morning. Billy and I are going down on the lower range to shoot at some wild plant life and all that kind of bunk. There wouldn't be anything for either of you to do, and it's pretty narrow in some places, Lola tells me, so you're better off keeping the home fires burning. Take a run over and see her this afternoon, why don't you? You two boys are as welcome in that poor kid's lonely life as the rain in the desert, and that reminds me that it looks as though we'll have a drop or two on our noble brows before the day is over, don't you think so, Billy?"

"Uh huh!"

"You mean you don't care whether it does or not, is that it, Billy? Well, come on, we better get along. S'long, Westy!"

"S'long!"

It wasn't until then that Westy became aware of Rip's absence. He looked outside and then concluded that he must have slipped down to the brook

to wash. Westy decided to have breakfast first before he did that very thing also.

He ate slowly and listened to hear Rip's footsteps coming up from the brook.

"I s'pose he's still peeved and is taking his time so he won't have to talk first. Well, he needn't stay away on account of that, because I intended to apologize to him this morning before I was even up. I can't think what I did or said to make him peeved, but it doesn't make any difference what it was—I'll apologize anyhow."

Westy was that kind of a chap.

He gathered up the breakfast dishes and placed them in a neat pile, noting absently by the presence of the fourth cup and plate that at least Rip had not fasted in making his anger complete.

A few minutes later after he had become tired of waiting, Westy trudged leisurely toward the brook and whistled loudly on purpose to warn his friendly enemy of his casual approach.

Whistling as he was, he also was thinking and planning what he would say to Rip when he met him at the brook.

"I'll say to him, when I see him, I'll say just like this: 'Rip, if I said anything yesterday to make you

sore, why I'm darned sorry, yes, sir!' Then I'll say just to make him laugh: 'We'll kiss and make up, how about it?' He's bound to fall for that, I should think."

Hands in his pockets and sauntering nonchalantly toward the little stream, he started another tune, but it stopped abruptly on his lips as he reached there. He looked about wonderingly.

Rip was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER XXI

GROWING DEEPER

For a second or two Westy was thoroughly alarmed, but soon felt reassured when his eyes fell upon the crystal-like water gurgling against the pearly stones.

"The little rascal, he's gone straight up the brook to Lola's to get away from me!"

With that knowledge under way he hurried back to the cabin to make himself look more presentable in the presence of ladies.

He was tying a little string tie, trying to knot it at just the right angle. In a cracked mirror that was just half its original size, he valiantly tried to accomplish the feat. He could see his face all right without standing on his toes and that notwithstanding his height. Of course, the cracks in the mirror gave him a most grotesque appearance. He really shivered as he viewed his own countenance. It looked so painfully distorted and his nose was cracked in three places. When he stood on his toes to see if

he had tied the knot, all that appeared to his struggling vision was his Adam's apple moving furiously with suppressed rage. So he gave it up and started out without caring another hang about appearances.

It was around ten o'clock when he struck off the main trail for Lola's and it occurred to him that perhaps Rip wouldn't like it, running him down in such a fashion. Rip was funny that way; Westy didn't know exactly how to take him, but he knew this much—that a good deal of the younger boy's skepticism was put on. But still he liked him in spite of that. He wanted the whole world to think he was something he wasn't.

"That's nothing," Westy said aloud, "there are plenty like that lying around loose in the world, and he's just a boy yet. He'll get over it—I hope. I bet he would go up there some time just to show me he was real brave and all the time he would be afraid himself. Lots of heroes have been made of that kind of stuff, too.

"I'll whistle again when I get near the place so he won't think I'm sneaking up on him. Maybe he'll have told Lola he's sore and don't want to see me and beat it down the brook, when he hears me. I won't let on anything about it if she asks me. I

got a good excuse for going there, anyway; Mr. Wilde told me to."

He came to a queer-shaped pine tree that was now familiar in marking the last few hundred feet before coming to the Redmond clearing. He started to whistle and slowed down his gait.

Presently Lola came to the opening and waved to him gayly. He returned the greeting and smiled inwardly to think that Rip was doing the very thing that he expected he would do, and there she was smiling just as though she knew nothing about it. She wanted to be loyal to both of them, Westy mused, and that was the right thing to do.

"'Lo, Westy," she said, beaming. "It's nice to see you this early. Now what could have brought you, I wonder?"

Just like a woman, Westy thought. Giving herself dead away.

"Oh, I don't know," Westy answered indifferently. "Mr. Wilde told me to run over and keep you folks company."

"Isn't that just like him! Do you know, Westy, my grandmother and I are going to miss you all very much when you leave here." She looked away wistfully: "I'd like to see what other cities look like!"

"Have you ever been away from here, Lola?" Westy asked.

"Only to Santa Fe three times; just on short visits. Father took me before he went to France, but I have never been any further. I've seen pictures of cities much bigger than Santa Fe; still I was terribly thrilled when I went there!"

Westy was touched and longed to ask her why they didn't leave their isolated home, but he just couldn't trespass upon her private affairs.

"You must forgive me, though, talking about myself," she continued, "but grandmother and I feel freer to talk with you all. We have never spoken so to any one before. Most people aren't interested in the petty troubles of a mountaineer. You can't blame them, really!"

"Not at all! Why shouldn't we be interested in other people's troubles? A scout should be—particularly!"

"Isn't that fine! Tell me more about them, Westy?"

Westy thought that herein was his chance to be real helpful in their poverty and was thinking how to go about the delicate topic when Mrs. Redmond

came out into the garden and smilingly nodded to him.

"Where's Rip this morning?" she asked.

Westy looked at Lola and her face was a blank as far as he could see. Then she turned to him in an apologetic manner.

"I never asked, did I? I really meant to ask you where he was when you came along. He isn't ill, is he?"

Her expression was so manifestly one of concern that Westy lost his poise for a moment as the memory of Rip's threat flitted through his mind.

"Why, hasn't he been here at *all* this morning?" He couldn't seem to make himself believe it.

"No," Lola said. "We haven't seen him at all. Where do you think he is?"

"I wish I was sure—but then he wouldn't if he did go up there——"

"You mean all his talk of yesterday, don't you? I wouldn't worry about that a bit, Westy. He wouldn't dare go in after all I told him. He's just a little peeved because you didn't urge him. Go on up—you'll find him ready to make up, I guess!"

Westy started on a dog trot and as he disappeared through the trees he called back to her excitedly:

"If he did go in anyway, do you think he'd have any chance——"

She couldn't hear the rest he said for his words were lost in the distance.

CHAPTER XXII

TO THE RESCUE

WESTY wasn't as optimistic as Lola. Stumbling over tree stumps and through underbrush, he continually berated himself for having wasted so much valuable time in talking.

Here and there he could see Rip's tracks in the soft damp earth. The ground must always be damp around there, he thought, for it hadn't rained in the mountains since they arrived four days ago.

In some places through the forest, on the way to the lake, twilight was perpetual, the trees being so thickly clustered that the sunlight was forever barred from penetrating through.

"If I had thought for a minute," Westy said aloud, "that he would really go up there, I'd have told Mr. Wilde this morning. He's one stubborn kid, I'll say. Maybe, though, he'll only go up there and sit around long enough to make me think he carried out his threat. I suppose he'll be hopping mad when I catch him stalling for time."

And so Westy's thoughts rambled on as hurriedly as his feet. He felt that the faster he went the less progress he made and all the while the time was flying.

He figured from the day before how long it would be before he could get there. The middle of the afternoon easy, he reckoned. The sun was at its zenith now and he was mighty hungry. But he didn't care at that, so long as he brought Rip safely back.

For some reason or other, Westy felt a certain parental superiority toward him, notwithstanding the slight difference in their ages. In short, he had a real responsibility where Rip was concerned.

Away to the right through a space where some trees had been felled, he could see the gray cliffs worn shiny and smooth from Time. "At last," he thought, "I'm almost there! I hope he don't fly up when he sees me."

So for the third time that day Westy whistled the warning of his advance. He slowed down as he gained the broad terrace, before cutting around to the lake.

Approaching with his eyes cast on the ground, he waited to hear Rip's voice. Sauntering along

slowly and kicking the earth with his shoe tip in an offhand manner, his heart leaped within him as he spied something on the mossy ground under a near-by tree.

A small pile of clothes he saw and a pair of scout shoes, giving mute evidence of its owner's absence. He dared not turn around for fully a minute, so sure was he of seeing nothing living and breathing in the lake.

Then above the droning hum of the haunted lake he heard a faint sound. He strained every nerve to catch it again and raised his eyes to scan the surface of the water.

He started.

On the further side of the lake an enormous tree that had undoubtedly fallen long ago from some cause or other, hung far out over the water, its branches spread on either side and its huge trunk securely wedged on land between the crevices in the stunted cliff.

Then he saw something move on the surface, right by the tree, and a faint cry rose above the incessant humming.

"Help!"

CHAPTER XXIII

WESTY HAS A STRUGGLE

It was almost inaudible, yet Westy knew the cry to be Rip's. It sounded exhausted, too, so there was no time to be lost!

Kicking off his heavy shoes, he dove straight in the water, striking it without hardly a ripple. He struck out with an overhand stroke and gained splendidly at the offset when suddenly he felt something pulling at his legs and had all he could do to keep himself up. Each time he attempted to go ahead, just that much he was pulled back again.

Westy was an excellent swimmer and had many experiences with the undertow in the waters of the Atlantic. He knew just how to buck the tide and when not to. But this was different; a new state of affairs entirely, and not much headway could be gained.

Every few feet he would be almost sucked under by this impetuous thing that lay hidden beneath the

calm and gleaming surface. It was almost incredible that Nature could be so subtle as to entice the poor, weak human being into such a trap by virtue of its warm, soothing waters.

However, for another short distance it seemed he was granted a respite and had shaken himself free of it, and in his joy he raised his head and called to Rip a few words of comfort.

All he could see of the trapped boy was his head and shoulders and his arms clasping the tree in a tight grasp. Rip didn't answer him.

"Do you hear, old boy?" Westy called again. "I'm on the way at last!"

Westy kept on and realized that Rip's exhaustion was pretty complete when it prevented him answering. And then again he felt the tugging at his legs. This time it was worse, much worse than before, and he realized that it was going to take all his strength to make it.

His arms were beginning to ache as the result of his body dragging its weight upon them. But with determined effort he at last got within twenty feet or so of Rip and the tree.

In the glimpses he got of the boy's face as it partially submerged and then reappeared with the ter-

rific undercurrent, he saw that it was of a death-like pallor.

"Rip, it's not much longer. Try and hold on a minute!"

Rip turned his head slowly, never loosening his grasp on the tree, and a look of pathetic hopelessness was in his tired eyes.

"You can't make it, Wes!" he called, his voice just above a whisper. "It's a regular whirlpool here within ten feet of me. I'm so tired, but it's my own fault!"

"Only a second now, kid!" Westy's voice was so cheerful, but he was thinking: "Huh! About ten feet, is it?" He didn't see how he was going to make it, either. His arms were so cramped, and if it was a whirlpool there . . . He stopped about twelve feet from Rip and rested a precious second, swinging one arm and then the other to revive his circulation.

Gauging the distance in his mind's eye, he took a plunge and was whirled like a top through the water, coming up directly alongside of the tree twelve feet or so nearer to the cliff than Rip was and out of the worst of the vortex.

Swinging his body with all his strength, he man-

aged to get one leg over the tree trunk and pulled the rest over gradually. Dragging himself forward, he reached the end, where the exhausted boy encircled the tree with his arms.

As he leaned forward to grasp them, Rip let one slip off and Westy saw to his dismay that his eyes were blinking suspiciously and grabbed the remaining hand quickly as Rip's head fell slowly forward on his chest.

Westy tried to pull, taking a firmer hold on the fainting boy's arm by twisting his own legs about the trunk to fortify himself. It was a terrible struggle, holding that inert body by one hand.

He pulled again, and as he did so he felt his own person jerked roughly and his eyes dilated with horror as he saw what had happened.

Rip's head had gone under!

WESTY TRIED TO PULL, TAKING A FIRMER HOLD ON THE FAINTING BOY'S ARM.

CHAPTER XXIV

A THOUGHT FOR TO-MORROW

WESTY never knew what great strength he had been given in that crucial moment. He only remembered afterward that every muscle in his body was strained to the utmost in being equal to that almost superhuman task.

It was enough to know that he finally pulled Rip out of the torrential current—unconscious; almost gone, but still a little life-giving breath left in the cold body.

A difficult thing to pull himself and his heavy burden over that slippery trunk. He thought he would never get to the cliff, so slow was his progress. But he made it and laid the still form face downward on the broad base.

Working tirelessly over the limp form to restore respiration, Westy noted some dark clouds gathering in the sky and partly obscuring the sun from view. He worked diligently, waiting to see the poor purpled lips utter a human sound.

After a short time elapsed and still he did not seem to respond, Westy became thoroughly alarmed, for a storm was coming on and it was getting darker overhead every minute.

He worked over him harder than ever, pleading, praying and asking for Divine intercession before the storm would break. Watching so intently, he really imagined that Rip was moving his body and his lips were moving in speech. But when he'd hold his face close to the unconscious boy he knew it was just hysteria that made him think he was moving and speaking when he wasn't. So taking hold of himself, he started in again and had just grasped Rip's arms to move him when the boy opened his eyes.

Westy's thankfulness knew no bounds.

"Say, Wes," he said a trifle weakly, "there's no dirt in your eyes at all. I'll take it all back right now!"

"Forget it, Rip!" Westy was wiping away the tears, unashamed, that were clouding his eyes. "I'm only glad that you're K. O. How d'ye feel?"

"O. K. Not so bad, huh?"

"I should say not. Do you think you'd be able to get up with some help in a few minutes?"

"Sure, I'm no cripple. Any hurry?"

"No, only I want to get you up in the shelter of the cliff before the storm breaks."

"Storm? Gee, that's so! We're on the base now, aren't we? How'd you ever do it, Wes? I thought I was a goner sure. Would have been if I hadn't lost my way getting up here. Went in the other direction, but got here eventually. Lucky I lost that much time. The water was like a merry-go-round where I was stuck. Couldn't get my legs out at all. Don't know how long I held on, but it seemed like hours."

"Well, we won't talk of it any more. You're tip-top now and that's that! Think you can make it now if I give you a lift?"

The storm was gathering in earnest and as the thunder rumbled in the distance and lightning flashed in frenzied streaks across the black horizon, the boys ascended the cliff slowly but surely.

Beginning a short distance back, the stunted cliff was topped by a thick jungle of trees and rank undergrowth, but at that Westy was thankful for the protection it afforded in the fury of the storm that followed.

They walked in the forest quite a ways with the

wind and rain beating all around them and came to a spot where some trees had fallen in some storm of long ago and which time had cemented together, forming a perfect shelter beneath their giant trunks.

Westy and Rip crawled under and in.

It was dry and warm, but didn't allow them any more room than they needed to lie down in.

Rip took his wet bathing suit off and spread it out to dry and Westy also removed his wet garments and then they both crawled under the dry dead leaves to keep warm.

"I'm pretty hungry, Wes, aren't you?"

"Don't speak of it now! It's a very delicate subject. Neither of us have had anything since breakfast. My gosh!"

"I'm so tired and sleepy, though," Rip said. "I guess I can close my eyes and forget it. We'll think of it to-morrow, eh?"

"Sure, 's time enough!"

But Westy wondered and was worried. He knew that any attempt to swim back across the lake would be foolhardy. The whole place was probably a series of the whirlpools. And it was senseless to take the chance. The forest was their only means of escape. They'd have to trust to luck to get out of it and

around over the mountain. That was the question now uppermost in his mind. How and where?

As if reading his thoughts, Rip faced him, half-asleep, and smiled:

"I guess the question for to-morrow is: Where do we go from here?"

CHAPTER XXV

LOST

THE desire to sleep soon overcame the desire to think and wonder more, and it made Westy powerless to do anything but just shut his eyes. It lulled his tired nerves like a powerful opiate after the day's events and soon he and Rip were breathing quietly and restfully through the long night.

A faint chink of light shining through the aperture told Westy that it was daylight. But he was disheartened when he heard the steady patter of rain upon the dead leaves outside. Rip was still sleeping peacefully as yet and Westy hadn't the heart to disturb him.

There was an awful gnawing sensation in his stomach and he felt mighty uncomfortable and stretched out a bit. With that Rip stirred and sat up quickly.

"Jiminy, I didn't know where I was for the moment! Some little hiding place, eh? I wonder what Unk thinks, though?"

"I've been thinking of that, too." Westy was thinking of a little tell-tale pile of clothes that would be discovered along with his own discarded shoes.

"After I locate something to chew on why we'll go and keep watch for them from the cliff, so they'll at least know we are still alive."

"That's right, I didn't think of it. Unk will be relieved—but peeved at me!"

They were putting on their dried things—that is, Westy was, but Rip had only his bathing suit. Then they crawled out, viewing the desolate scene around them, for it was raining harder than they thought.

"We'll have to look up some eats somewhere, Rip. Feel all right to mosey around with me?"

"Sure."

"All right then. You better take my socks. I've more on than you."

"Naw, I don't feel cold yet. We're a hot-looking team, though, to be walking around in the jungle and half undressed at that in all this rain. Let's go!"

The quest in search of food was exceedingly arduous as they walked further and further into the thick forest. In the end, as the fruits of their labors in beating down underbrush and tall weeds, all they found was some wild berries here and there. It

sufficed a little, but they hadn't so far found a stream anywhere in which to quench their thirst.

"We'll have to make the best of it for now, Rip. There's no telling what time it is a day like this without the sun, so we better make the same tracks for the cliff and signal your Uncle and Billy some way. Lola's sure to come, too."

They started back. Rip's bare feet were getting uncomfortably sore from the stone bruises and cuts he was continually receiving and Westy's socks were horribly soggy and cold. He took them off and threw them away.

It seemed that they had been walking a long time and Westy looked frankly puzzled.

"Do I imagine it, or are the trees thicker than when we came this way hunting for the berries? It looks different to me somehow, don't you think so?"

"Sure it does, Wes. This isn't the way we came at all—I can't see our tracks now at all!"

"You're right! Let's go back a bit."

They went back, but looking for their footprints became a decided search.

"We might as well go right on until we find them," Westy said, as puzzled as ever.

"Yeh, let's keep strict watch this time!"

On they went, eyes fixed on the ground and at the same time victims to the overhanging branches and thick thorny brush. Their faces and arms were scratched almost beyond recognition.

Hour after hour passed.

They were getting hungry again; in fact, they had been that way for a long while and their thirst was acute. No water had they spied yet, and after devouring some more berries in resignation, they rested a little and then went on.

Hardly a word had been spoken between them, for they were keenly aware of their serious situation and the rain was falling as bad as ever with night coming on apace.

Westy thought that the cliff must have fallen prey to some supernatural power and had been swallowed up in the forest's depths also.

Hungry, tired and thirsty, they watched the gray shadows of twilight steal through the closely grown trees, and where even in broad daylight it was a place of gloom.

Now it seemed more depressing than ever and the echoes of their voices came back to them like mocking ghosts of days long past.

It was awfully eerie, and as they sat down on a bowlder to rest, huddled close together to keep warm, the tall trees stood out like gaunt shadows in a sepulchral world.

"Do you realize, Rip? Here we are—two scouts——"

"Yep!"

"And we're lost!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THEY MEET A LOWLY STRANGER

ALL through that long night Westy and Rip took turns trying to get some sleep on the hard bowlder. Tired and sleepy though they were, they couldn't rest any more than a few moments at a time and were more than glad to give up their uncomfortable berth to one another.

It was Westy's turn to sit up and he thought it must be way past midnight. How they would welcome the coming dawn! He was so cold and as he sat there shivering in the pouring rain, he wondered if they would ever find their way out. He shivered more when he thought of Lola's verdict about those who had been trapped there before.

Surely, there must be some mysterious force at work there! What else was it that made them lose their tracks so easily? He wondered if Rip had overcome his skepticism and accepted Lola's story as true. No matter what name people gave it, Westy was convinced that something supernatural had invaded that dark dank place and reigned supreme.

There wasn't a sound but the falling rain and it seemed to be growing more silent all the time. He thought that every breathing thing but they in that vast jungle must be dry and sheltered.

He was trying to shield Rip's face with his hands and had covered his legs with his blouse. His head continually sagged forward, while his whole body felt cramped from the unnatural position he was in, but he thought as he exercised a little to relieve the tension, they had to stick close together in a case like that, no matter how it hurt.

It never occurred to Westy to feel any resentment toward the younger boy and that Rip's perversity was responsible for their precarious situation. He just simply took things as they came along and whether purposely or not, forgot the root of the evil entirely.

Westy was that kind of a scout.

Finally he came out of his chilly reverie with a start. Rip was actually sleeping. He grinned as he thought of the saying of being tired enough to sleep on a rock. Rip certainly must have an iron-bound back to sleep all that time. Well, let him; it would do him good!

The continual downpour made Westy wonder again what they were going to do about drinking wa-

ter. He was beginning to feel a little feverish already. They'd have to drink the rain water if they could find something to catch it in—but there wasn't much likelihood of finding anything.

Their last resort would be the stagnant pools that were gradually deepening and widening all over from the incessant rain. Perhaps the dawn would bring the sunshine, he thought hopefully.

Rip moved suddenly and cried, as in fright.

"What's the matter, kid?" Westy thought he was dreaming.

"There's something heavy on my hand—I can't move it."

He reached out and felt around in the darkness to where Rip's hand had dangled on the ground in his sleep.

Even in the dark as his own hand came in contact with the cold, slimy object Westy knew instinctively what it was.

Huge and heavy, it had rested its whole weight on the sleeping boy's hand, and quickly seizing it in both of his own, Westy flung it as far as his strength permitted.

"What was it, Wes?" Rip was relieved as he heard the thud of the falling thing.

"Nothing—just a nice big snake!"

CHAPTER XXVII

A LITTLE HOPE

"I DON'T think I care about lying down again," Rip sighed. "The next one that happened to come along would be liable to park on my chest."

"You're darn lucky it wasn't a rattler or you wouldn't be here to give a hang where the next one parked!"

"What kind of a snake was it?"

"How in the name of Johanna do I know! Do you think I've got eyes like a cat or do you think I stopped to affectionately examine it?"

"Tut! I feel as though I'm wet clear to my heart and I'm getting thirstier by the minute."

"Don't mention it, Rip. I only hope it gets light soon so we can get the lay of the land again and feed on some more berries. They're individualists when it comes to the food line here—no competition.

"The bushes ought to be good and wet from all this rain and that'll be a little moisture, anyway. Gee, I'll never use the word berries in slang any

more, Wes. They've certainly been a life-saver, but we'll be getting fed up on them after another day. Suppose we haven't found our way out by to-morrow night?"

"Well, we haven't then. What's the use of worrying about it until then?"

"I suppose that's the best way to look at it. You've ten times more nerve than I'll ever have!"

Westy liked that frankness in Rip. Despite his sullen stubbornness at times, he'd at least admit when he was beaten.

Morning came again—raining, and they started to walk on, Westy, the keen edge of his hopes dulled a little, but still outwardly cheerful and Rip silent in his disappointment.

After devouring more berries they went on, trying not to think of the imperious demand of their thirst, and as the morning wore on they became tired and stopped to rest again.

"Doesn't seem to be many berries around here, Rip! I'm getting hungry again. Shall we go ahead?"

"I don't care. Whatever you say; but for my part, I'm kind of sick of them. I've got to have water, Wes, that's all there is to it!"

"I know, Rip, but that is stagnant water—it's dangerous and vile!"

But Rip had come to the point where Nature was forcing him and made him fearless of the danger of anything, for before Westy had finished warning him he was down on his knees, taking draught after draught of the green-looking water in his small cupped hands.

Westy shuddered as he watched the stuff drip through Rip's fingers and hoped he would be given the strength to refrain from drinking it for a while at least.

They trudged on again, hardly caring now where they went, and Rip stopping at intervals to consume more and more of the putrid water in spite of Westy cautioning him to stop.

Shivering though they both were, in their wet garments, Westy noticed a decided hectic flush upon Rip's face and it worried him.

It was getting dark again, and still no lull in the storm, but Westy's weary-looking eyes brightened as he caught sight of something ahead.

"Look, Rip, old top! On the ground!"

"What is it?"

"Our tracks—from yesterday!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

WATER

HOPE sprung anew! Their hearts fairly sang.

"Guess we better stay right here for the night, Rip. We're likely to lose them again if we try to follow them in this dingy light."

"Whatever you say. I could stretch out on the soaking ground, I'm so tired!"

"Same here, but on the other hand that wouldn't pay. We've been soaked long enough as it is."

Looking around, Westy spied a huge tree, with big broad limbs, wide enough for them to recline on. The tree next to it was growing so close that its branches also added further protection from the rain and provided more space for their bodies.

They clambered up and by Westy doubling his knees under him it enabled Rip to lay his head back, but kept his knees upright. The branches of the other tree supported Westy's back nicely.

All he was able to do was catnap in his stiff, rigid position, for he felt duty bound to keep a watchful

eye on Rip, who was likely to fall out should he try to turn suddenly. It was terribly uncomfortable, but better than the wet ground, and their close quarters afforded more warmth.

Hour after hour seemed to have passed and no murmur or word had emanated from Rip's lips. Just the steady laborious breathing—unusually heavy, Westy thought, but probably from the discomfort. Still, he slept!

After quite a lapse of time Rip moved slightly and Westy immediately leaned forward.

"Westy?" Rip's voice had a strange sound.

"Yes? What is it?"

"I've just got to have some more of that water!"

"Rip, old kid, I'd gladly go and get it, but there isn't a thing to carry it in and I dare say I'd never find even a pool in this darkness."

"Never thought of that, Wes! 'S all right——" His voice trailed away drowsily and the next moment his steady breathing was resumed.

"Just dreaming, I guess," Westy said.

And so he sat on until he thought that night was a thing made up of terrifying silence; an abyss of blackness wherein the hours hid and disported playfully about, instead of going quickly by as all good

daytime hours did. The hours of that night simply plunged Westy into the very depths of despair.

"Ah, but the tracks!" He had forgotten them for the moment. Dawn would bring them something at that, so he must not give up.

Rip was mumbling again, talking jumbled in his sleep and let his legs fall over the limb.

"Wes, you there?"

"Of course. What now?"

"S'more of that water 's all I want!"

"You that thirsty, Rip?"

"Yeh, can't help it. S'more of that water 's all——"

"Gosh, I can't get it now. Can't you wait a little longer until it brightens a little? I don't want to lose my way in the darkness and leave you here alone. We'd both be alone in this infernal place then!"

"'S all right. Can't be 'lone, huh? Must have water, though, 's all. *Water!*"

His voice was not the voice of Rip, Westy thought. It sounded like some strange being whom he did not know. He mumbled again.

"Been dreamin', Wes—that Unk was hitting me on the head with a hammer for going in the lake. Hit me so hard—still hurts. My head! Let me lay

my head in your lap, Wes, won't you? No sissy—only tree's so hard and it hurts."

"Sure thing!" Westy pulled him gently by the arms, meanwhile thinking deep thoughts. Rip's head sank in his lap and it gave Westy a chance to stretch his legs a bit over on the next limb.

" 'S soft snap," Rip continued in the strange voice. "Tell Unk to bring 's more that water—nice green water!"

Westy's hand touched his forehead and face lightly and then felt his burning body. There was no doubt of it, he realized.

Rip was delirious.

CHAPTER XXIX

DESPAIR

THREE nights and two days! What was this dawn bringing to them? Rain, hunger and thirst again? Westy wondered.

Where there had been nothing but blackness above and beneath them there were now little faint touches of light in the dark void above the trees.

It grew lighter with Rip's every second breath. He was turning and twisting his head in Westy's lap and mumbling incoherently.

Poor Westy was aching in every muscle, feverish from thirst and sickeningly hungry. Also greater than his wants was the despair he felt over Rip's alarming condition.

He listened as he thought he heard a lull in the falling of the rain. Then it gradually lessened and stopped as the dawn broke clear and promising overhead.

The next thing to do was awaken Rip and Westy hated doing it in his condition. He talked to him and the sick boy opened his eyes and stared.

"We have to get down, Rip, do you understand?" Rip nodded and sat up and Westy slid to the ground and helped him down.

He obeyed just like a child, but said nothing and immediately laid down on the earth again and closed his eyes. He was asleep within a very few minutes.

Westy turned and watched the sun peeping through the curtain of dawn, so warm and friendly. It made him feel warm and partially dry for the first time in three days, but his spirits sank as he saw that the tracks were leading further into the forest and not where they had hoped. And his hunger and thirst were distracting him.

He noted that Rip's breathing was easier and his temperature seemed to have dropped. But fever acted that way, Westy thought, and got bad at night. Still, if it wasn't so bad during the day he could go on a little with help. He'd see how he felt, but meanwhile he must get something to eat first.

There wasn't a berry bush in sight and as he looked at the stagnant pool a little distance from him he shook his head and reached up in one of the limbs of the tree.

Pulling the leaves off one after the other, he

sucked the moisture out of them greedily, but with delight. It took the worst of the parched feeling away and then he gave some to Rip, who chewed leaf and all.

Looking at his eyes, Westy saw that Rip was so bad as to be incognizant of his surroundings and stared blankly ahead.

It was deplorable, but they would have to go on whether the boy was in his right mind or not, but Westy was sure of one thing and that was that he wouldn't leave Rip alone for any length of time. Better not to leave him at all—still he had to have something to eat. . . .

Just then he saw a large bird!

CHAPTER XXX

A SCOUT WITH WINGS

It was perched low on a near-by tree and its plumage was of the most gorgeous coloring that Westy had ever seen. Its body was plump and quite long, and its tail was dotted like some exquisite jeweled fan.

He sat down on a bowlder and watched it as it warbled a deep-throated trill. Ostensibly, it was doing this for Westy's sole benefit, for when it got through it would look to him as though awaiting applause and start off again, sweeter than before.

Westy wondered if it would be wrong to kill this beautiful thing and satisfy his own terrible hunger or take the chance of finding something and go on?

The bird fascinated him! The sweet notes pouring out of its tiny throat, the eyes seeming to look his way, as if to say it was lonely also and enjoyed the chance meeting. And the lovely plumage! It was made for a paradise and sunshine, not the dank, dark forest.

Its tameness and beauty tempted Westy to whistle low and sweet as he had heard Lola do that day so long ago when they first saw the lake. She had said that a bird would eventually come to you if you would sit quietly and whistle long enough.

At first the bird just looked and listened, never moving. But as Westy kept on, it flew to the ground about five feet away, then came nearer and nearer until it hopped on his bare foot.

Westy reached down carefully and stroked its glossy, well-shaped head. Very gently he put his hand over it and raised it up to his lap. To his surprise, the bird nestled against him comfortably and relaxed.

"I couldn't cook it," Westy thought as he watched it, "but I'm desperate for something and it would be some sort of food at that. But how——"

Instinctively his hand clasped the bird tighter. He couldn't bear to look at this beautiful creature he intended to destroy. But something made him look again and he succumbed to the desire to glance at it once more before its life would be extinct.

As he glanced down the bird looked up at him, implicit trust in its expression. Westy tried to drown the tenderness welling up within him and

forced a stern look upon his countenance, and as he faced it for the last time the bird chirped and hopped upon his arm and he grasped it quickly with his free hand.

But the mute appeal in those eyes was too much for Westy. He turned his head away and then back again, smiling:

"All right, old man," he said. "You want to live just the same as I do, isn't that so?"

It almost seemed to understand.

"Well," Westy continued aloud, "you're going to go right on living *now*, as far as I'm concerned. If I can't find anything else to eat to-day I'll start digging for worms the same as you do."

With that he released the bird and it flew over his head. He couldn't see where it went, but he heard it warbling again—the sweet, deep-throated trill.

It kept up so insistently that Westy pushed through the damp brush a little way to see where it had gone. As he parted the tall weeds he beheld the little golden throat perched on the limb of a walnut tree, abounding with its ripened fruit.

He rushed forward with eagerness and as he climbed up on the lower limb the bird looked at him

almost significantly and took to one of the top branches.

Westy jammed and crammed his pockets full; meaning to crack them on the bowlder. After he had filled every available space in his trousers, he clambered down. Then he looked up at his benefactor and smiled.

"Thanks, old man, for the find! You're a better scout than I am any day!"

In answer the bird trilled again and then flew—up, up into the sunshine and away.

Westy watched him enviously.

"Still," he mused, "I guess after all it's a case of Even Stephen. God gave me hands and feet and you—your wings!"

CHAPTER XXXI

THE TRAIL ONCE AGAIN

WESTY made up his mind he'd get out of that forest before another night imprisoned them. With the help of the sun they could go directly east, then northeast. They'd be bound to strike the trail some time.

But there was Rip! Getting worse and worse all the time. How he would manage it he didn't know; hadn't any idea, except that his mind had been made up to find a way!

It was discouraging and unbearably tedious trying to help the sick boy walk through the thorny underbrush, unhindered in its growth throughout the summers of many long centuries. Not only that, but he had to keep constantly on the alert for snakes, for they had had many narrow escapes from them so far.

Much time was lost in stopping to rest, but it had to be done in order to go on again. He didn't dare overtax Rip any more than could be avoided

and his own strength was being tried to the very limits of endurance.

There were odd moments when Rip was partly rational and at such times Westy would reason it out with him that he was trying to get him back to his Uncle and for him to do his part and keep up until they got there. In his half-dazed condition he seemed to understand, and when they started on again it was incredible to Westy almost to see his indomitable will overrule his physical weakness.

The sun was at their back now and still no sign of a trail—nothing. Nothing but trees! Westy began to hate the sight of them.

They were both pretty near exhaustion again and, while Rip rested on a pile of dead leaves, Westy went ahead a little to beat down the brush that grew thicker in that region than anywhere they had struck so far.

In appearance both of the boys had changed pitifully. The sunken eyes and wan look about the face, so white and drawn, and the parched lips. Even about the body the flesh had fallen away terribly. But Westy looked the worst and he doubted whether his own mother would have recognized him then.

It seemed to him that there wasn't a whole piece

of flesh on his arms and hands. His face and legs and feet were also swollen from the poisonous weeds he had trampled down. His feet weren't so painful as on the first day or two; they had now become calloused, but that didn't alleviate the pain of the infected cuts and scratches.

Rip, though not so horribly scratched and cut, looked pitiful enough with his fever-ridden eyes and face. His continual calls for water gave Westy little peace of mind. He had given him the rain-soaked leaves that he found, but now they were scarce as the sun had dried all the available ones. And he was determined not to give the sick boy another drop of that death-infested water.

His own thirst and hunger was like some terrible disease gnawing first at his body and then at his brain. He couldn't even think clear thoughts. The dread of losing his mind—but then he knew he must keep up for Rip's sake and he would. So he was satisfied to devour some dry leaves and swallowed them whole.

Ah, he saw something! A tree just ahead of him he noticed shaded nicely by the rest was still dripping from the rains. It made him think of Rip's thirst and it looked easy to climb.

He ran back to where Rip was sleeping peacefully and carefully removed the tattered blouse he had put on him. Then running back to the tree again he got up on the first few limbs when he noticed some peculiar-looking berries hanging from the upper branches. So he filled the blouse with as many wet leaves as it would hold and decided to go higher and sample some of the fruit.

Reaching the top limb, he leaned over to grasp some, but his hand was retarded in the movement by the sight that met and dazzled his hollowed eyes.

Within a stone's throw of him was the trail!

CHAPTER XXXII

DREAMING

HAD Westy been a medieval knight in quest of the Holy Grail and had at last beheld the object of his search before his very eyes, he couldn't have been happier.

Tears of unrestrained emotion stained his gaunt face as he looked down upon this veritable land of promise. Away to the northwest his eyes followed its winding course and his heart leaped to see a tiny spiral of smoke curling its way upward with such a restful, comfortable look.

It was entirely unconscious—that simile. But he felt ever after that it suited the purpose. Curling smoke meant warmth and food, comfort and rest. And how Rip needed them now! Typical of Westy that he should forget his own needs at such a time.

He helped himself to the berries and put some in the blouse, hoping it would tide them over until—— He was afraid to let the thought form itself completely for fear that perhaps after all it was nothing

more than a visionary trend his starvation was taking. But then he was sure he was feeling better after consuming the berries and his head didn't swim quite as badly as before. No, it was *real* and so near!

He hurried back to Rip.

As he looked at the sleeping boy he wished he could only make him comprehend that his sufferings would soon be ministered to and that his tortured body would rest in a nice soft bunk.

The fever was beginning to mount again with the advent of sunset and he was babbling meaningless phrases. Westy took the wet leaves and moistened his parched lips. He opened his eyes, but there wasn't a sign of recognition in them.

Westy didn't know whether it was harmful or not in his condition, but he fed Rip some of the berries. After a few mouthsful, however, he refused any more.

Just as the sun was setting they came out on the trail. Near them was a large rock high and dry, and he decided it would be just the place for them that night. It was large enough to allow them to lay full length and side by side for the first time in three nights. He could make it a little softer with some

dry leaves, even if he had to make many trips back and forth in getting them. Westy's thoughts were getting breathless, too.

He figured that he and Rip could make it the next day and reach the shack by mid-afternoon even considering the stop-overs with Rip, so he set to work fixing their rocky berth. The leaves were nice and warm and dry, and Rip sank back in them with a sigh.

That at least was a hopeful sign Westy thought as he watched him and wondered if he'd hold out the rest of the way. He didn't even ask for water now —nothing but sleep. Was it a good or bad sign? He didn't know, but Mrs. Redmond would probably know what to do for him to-morrow. He repeated the word to-morrow again and he thought it fairly lilted as he uttered it and laid down contentedly in the warm leaves.

His anxiety about Rip kept him awake and he watched the stars overhead. Cool though it was, he was thankful for the clear windless night of the open in preference to the damp dark forest. Then he piled more leaves on Rip, fearful of him taking more cold along with the fever and left himself uncovered.

He wished, oh, how he wished as he lay there, to

have just one drink of water before his eyes closed in sleep. That thought had a distressing effect upon him ever since his thirst began. His throat immediately began to ache and he had all sorts of unpleasant sensations until he overcame them by force of will.

Sleep came to him mercifully, though, and he dreamed that he was drinking large buckets of water out of an old well. Presently Lola and her grandmother came along and Mrs. Redmond called excitedly for him to stop drinking it, that the well was poisoned. Lola screamed a loud piercing shriek and it was so shrill that it awakened him.

He raised his head to look, so realistic was the scream.

There on the edge of the rock were two green eyes, gleaming like darts of flame in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXXIII

JUST A FEW HOURS TO GO

It was too dark to distinguish who the owner of the eyes happened to be. All Westy could see was the outline of a head, shoulders and paws resting on the rock's edge.

He realized after the first shock passed that whatever kind of an animal it was, it wouldn't do for him to betray fear.

He stayed perfectly rigid in the same position as when he had raised slightly on his elbow and first saw the eyes. The animal sniffed the air but never moved—keeping an attitude of being ready to spring in a second.

Westy could see by the head and shoulders that the animal was a good size; possibly a puma whose lair was in the haunted forest. What luck they escaped him there.

While these thoughts flashed through his mind he returned the stare, never letting his eyes stray an inch from that pair of veritable live coals. He con-

centrated every nerve and muscle, his own large dark eyes accentuated by their hollowness set in the thin white haggard face.

His arm was asleep and his body shook from the pressure on the nerve in his elbow, but still he stuck bravely. He was thankful that Rip was sleeping so quietly—his breathing could hardly be detected and Westy prayed that he wouldn't move.

Finally the animal sniffed the air again and moved its head. It withdrew one paw—then the other and the head disappeared under the rock.

It wasn't until Westy heard the heavy body on its thick padded feet plodding toward the forest that he finally relaxed—exhausted. He didn't have the strength to look and make sure. The events of the last few days had used up too much vitality—he wanted sleep and didn't care where the animal went.

When he awakened the sun was shining in his face and Rip's old familiar cry was ringing in his ears.

"Water! Just—drop—water!"

It fairly made his heart ache to hear him and he sprang up. Rip was still warmly covered by the leaves, but his eyes looked without seeing anything.

"We'll get water now, very soon! Do you hear? We have to go on a bit first."

He steadied Rip as they got down off the rock, but he staggered and stumbled along in spite of Westy's help.

But they went on fairly well until noontime, when Rip's fever got worse. Even with Westy's arm around him he seemed not to be able to manipulate his legs any more.

They would go a few steps and his knees would bend under and his head sink forward on his chest. Westy felt it was really cruel to make him go on in that condition—but they were so near and neither of them could stand another night without water. The heat also was getting unbearable as the day wore on.

Westy's hunger by now was so terrible that his body seemed to have become numb from the continual suppression. His arm instinctively tightened about Rip as he thought of it, but the younger boy roughly pushed him aside and with an almost maniacal expression on his face, leaped ahead for twenty feet or more and then fell face downward.

Westy ran forward. Kneeling beside him, he raised his head up to his lap.

Rip was unconscious.

CHAPTER XXXIV

WHEN IGNORANCE WAS BLISS

THE evening of the day that Rip had gone to the lake with Westy following in his wake, Mr. Wilde and Billy returned to the cabin, thoroughly tired and their clothes dripping wet.

"Guess the kids won't be coming along to-night," Mr. Wilde remarked to Billy, who was kindling some logs in the fireplace.

"I should say not! Mrs. Redmond wouldn't let them, I guess. Hospitality is served with a capital H there."

After supper with the wind howling all about and the rain pouring off the roof, they sat down to read. Ten o'clock found Billy yawning.

"That means we'll hope for a better day to-morrow," said Mr. Wilde.

But when morning brought nothing more than the doleful swish of wind and storm above their heads, they turned over with a sigh and slept until almost noon.

"Well, no sign of those little tramps yet," Mr. Wilde said, a cup of hot coffee balanced in one hand and a two-weeks'-old copy of the Saturday Evening Post in the other.

"Thought you read that all." Billy pointed to the Post.

"I did. And I know all the 'ads' by heart, too!"

"What's the idea then?"

"Only that I can never read at breakfast time home. When I'm away like this I take a malicious delight in reading while I'm eating just because my wife tells me it's bad for the digestion and also a serious breach of etiquette. Even though I've read these things over fifty times I enjoy them as much as though I'd never laid eyes on them before. Only at breakfast, though."

"Why specify breakfast?"

"Because that's when my wife don't approve of me doing it."

"Why, you're no more grown up than Westy or Rip at that rate!"

"I know it! Show me any man who is—in his heart!"

With the night coming on and the rain still swirl-

THEY WOULD GO A FEW STEPS AND HIS KNEES WOULD BEND UNDER.

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ing about the cabin, Mr. Wilde began to get a little anxious about the boys.

"Even as bad as it's been to-day, I shouldn't think those kids would impose on the Redmonds' good nature any longer. My heavens, a little soaking won't hurt them. They're supposed to be scouts, not ninnies."

"Oh, I don't think that's the reason at all. I've an idea it's just been a treat for those people to have them as guests for these two desolate nights and days. They've probably urged them, knowing we wouldn't be anxious."

"Perhaps you're right, Billy. They are old enough to take care of themselves and know what's the right thing to do. I guess we will see them in the morning all right."

It was almost noontime of the next day before Mr. Wilde and Billy were all prepared to leave for the eastern end of the range.

Billy was inside getting the rest of his stuff together, while the older man stood outside, waiting. He caught sight of Lola coming up the path from the brook. She smiled sweetly as she came toward him.

"Do you feel like a bird to-day after all the rain?" she asked him.

"Indeed I do."

"It isn't possible that the boys aren't up yet?"

"What? What did you say—not up?" He couldn't seem to quite comprehend.

Billy came out after hearing her question and interrupted.

"Haven't they been at your place these two nights past?"

"Why, no!" Her face went dead white as she remembered.

She told them the incident of the haunted region and about Westy's departure for the lake after Rip.

"I never dreamed but what they came back safely, Mr. Wilde, or I'd have come here and told you." Her voice was quivering and a tear slid down her frightened face.

Mr. Wilde patted her shoulder comfortingly.

"There now, it isn't your fault. They aren't babies—but yet—they've been gone since the day before yesterday. . . ."

CHAPTER XXXV

WESTY RUNS TRUE TO FORM

"My theory is," broke in Billy, "that you're all crossing your bridges too soon. We don't know until we find out. Come on!"

Lola ran ahead to tell her grandmother and promised to join them along the trail.

There was little talk between them. Even the optimistic Billy was silent and when Lola caught up with them her face was so grave that it tended to make them more alarmed than ever.

"It seems longer than when we came here the other day," Mr. Wilde said to relieve the tension.

"Yes," said Lola, "and I didn't think then I'd be the cause——"

"Now, my dear child!" Mr. Wilde was touched by her self-indictment. "No one is to blame but Rip and at that I couldn't call him down for having been born with a stubborn disposition, could I?"

"Of course not," Lola agreed.

"But Westy," Mr. Wilde continued, "that boy is

a jewel. He has more sense than Rip'll ever have. Likes adventure, but uses discretion."

"What's the use of talking about it?" Billy interposed. "We are as we are!"

"No doubt. I hate to think of the two mothers and fathers who are going to accuse me of wanton laxity in my care of their sons if we don't find them. I shouldn't have taken the responsibility at all. It's my fault!"

"Say, for the love of goodness," Billy pleaded, "you're like the fellow who ordered his mother-in-law's flowers two weeks before she died!"

"Well, he had a reason," Mr. Wilde said, his humorous squint coming to the fore.

"Well, so have you," Billy answered, "a reason to cheer up. I've more faith in Westy's gameness than Rip's bragging. If we don't see any signs of them up there we still shouldn't feel discouraged."

"Why?" questioned Lola.

"But," Mr. Wilde said, "Lola says herself that if they were lucky enough to get out of the lake and land on the cliff they'd have less chance than ever trying to get out of the forest. No one ever has yet, so what chance have two kids? Why, she says there's absolutely no way of getting any nourishment or

water and the place is filled with snakes. Nothing but a dense jungle of trees and stagnant pools. Plenty of malaria I bet. Three days they've been gone—think of it!"

"Now come on," Billy said. "I feel as anxious as you, but I'm not going to give up so easy. Here we are now!"

Turning away from the broad terrace, they could see at first glance what they knew they would see—nothing. Not a sign nor sound of human life but their own, and as they stood looking out over the placid-looking water three minds were all of one thought.

It was so terribly silent that the humming sounded louder than ever. It would almost seem that the heinous spirit of the lake was mocking these humans in their fears and anxiety and challenging their puny bodies to combat this terrific force that Nature gave it as its birthright.

Lola wasn't the crying kind of a girl. She felt so keenly that it wouldn't have happened but for her recital of the legend that she was angry with herself and from anger she felt fear and pity for the boys. Then she cried and turned toward the trees that Mr. Wilde and Billy might not see her emotion.

As her eyes were gradually clearing again she saw through the blur—two pair of scout shoes on the ground, right at her feet.

"Look!" she exclaimed, and as the two men turned she picked them up.

It was the last straw as far as Mr. Wilde was concerned; he couldn't even bear to look and turned away, walking toward the terrace. Billy and Lola followed him heavy-hearted and almost without hope.

"We'll go right away," Billy said, "and get around into the forest."

"I'm going with you then," Lola said determinedly, "but I'll run home first and get food and water. They'll need it and so will we! Wait for me there!"

She was gone and had disappeared on the narrow path winding above the ravine. After just about time enough to have reached the trail, they heard her scream.

"Mr. Wilde! Billy! Quick—oh, quick!"

They came running out of the narrow path and reached her side almost breathless. She was waving her hands with great excitement and her face was a picture of convulsive terror and pity.

Along the upper part of the trail they saw!

It was Westy, his clothes now just a few rags covering his raw swollen flesh and his face puffed and deathly white. With great effort he was carrying Rip, whose inert body hung over his shoulder.

As he stumbled toward them, his feet pitifully cut and bleeding, they could hear him babbling unintelligible words to the unconscious boy.

Hurrying to relieve him of his burden, he pushed them aside—holding fast to Rip as a mother would her child in great danger. His brain, sick as it was, could not crush the spirit that was Westy Martin nor deter him from keeping trust.

His ague-stricken form straightened up as if to defy them to bar his way. A look of inanity filled his usual bright expressive eyes and when he spoke his voice had been reduced to almost a whisper from his weakened state.

"Must—get—him—back! Not 'nother night without water!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

BILLY DOES SOME REMINDING

As a result of Lola's insistence, the two emaciated boys lay that night in the cottage, still very sick, but in competent hands.

The Redmonds had to learn everything in life by experience and their knowledge of all human ills was derived from that same source.

All through that night Mr. Wilde, Billy and the two emergency nurses waited anxiously for the delirious chatter to stop—to hear the gratifying sound of slow yet steady breathing that means normal sleep. And their waiting was not in vain.

Many days passed before Westy and Rip were able to recognize their surroundings and friends. And then their recovery was rapid.

Then came the day when Mrs. Redmond propped them up a little on their cots to watch the sunset. Their open windows overlooked the ledge and deep ravine below.

There once again Westy watched the huge red ball slowly disintegrate until the blue background and

fleecy clouds became obliterated as it dropped behind the mountain opposite, leaving the vast ethereal spaces a mass of crimson-purple fire and the western heavens a sphere apart.

Even this, thought Westy, cannot last. This rainbow spectacle so vast and commanding in its great beauty must also pay homage to the law of gravitation, withdrawing its place in the scheme of things and making way for the somber shadows of twilight.

Everything was silent in this quiet hour but the brook. It sounded loudest in the twilight and tinkled its silvery way over the rocks and into the chasm below.

"Rip, that mountain over there——"

"Yes?"

"The world. Reality! It's horrible and real. I'd rather live in my imagination here—after facing those real things again, wouldn't you?"

"You bet!"

"To be drowning, to be hungry and thirsty and cold—that's real! It's then we know what life really is, eh? No make-believe about that. You almost hate everything you've loved before. I mean the sun when you're thirsty, the night and the rain that

keep you back from finding your way and the barren earth that won't yield you nourishment. That's real and it won't do a thing for you. You're just left to make or break with two hands and two feet, no matter how helpless Nature has made you. Am I right?"

"What? You ask me that? After this, Wes, I'm willing to learn from you—not give my paltry opinion on anything."

"I'm glad to hear it," Mr. Wilde said as he and Billy came into the room. "You've learned a pretty dear lesson, I guess."

"Oh, we all make mistakes," Westy defended him.

"I can't see that you have, Westy. If you have they've been good ones," Mr. Wilde reminded.

"We're here now, aren't we?" Rip said, hoping the matter would forthwith be a closed incident. "Westy got me back all right, so that's all there is to it!"

"Yes, thanks to Westy," his uncle said. "But I failed to see how you intended making we modern pikers sit up and take notice!"

Billy laughed. "Not from what I saw of him on Westy's shoulder that day. He wasn't even able to sit up and take notice himself!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

OLD SCOUT AND THE LEGEND

A WEEK later Westy and Rip were back again in the cabin, looking none the worse for having gone through such an ordeal—thanks to the kindness of Mrs. Redmond and Lola.

It was Saturday; they were alone, the two older members being out on the trail making up for lost time, as they were due in Santa Fe the next week.

Lola had invited them for supper Sunday evening and they had planned to leave Monday morning.

"You know, Rip," Westy said impulsively, "I'd risk my neck again if I thought I could help Lola and her grandmother. They've certainly been the best!"

"I kinda think so," Rip answered, and added: "You like Lola pretty well, don't you?"

Westy reddened and laughed.

"Go on, Rip! Try something else!"

They heard voices and presently the door opened, admitting Educational Films. Billy put his stuff down and Mr. Wilde sank wearily into a chair.

"Well, I guess that's all for this Range. The only thing we missed taking was the fleas. I'm satisfied to pull out of here now."

"Yet," Billy said, "it's been nice knowing those fine people!"

"Indeed it has," Mr. Wilde agreed, "and that reminds me——"

"Oh, yes," Billy interrupted, "the guide and that party of roughnecks. Go on, tell them!"

"We met some people this morning just as we stepped out in the trail. An old man—pioneer type, called himself Old Scout, and a bunch of newly rich—you know the kind. He's a guide and was taking them up to the haunted lake to camp over to-night and are coming back to-morrow.

"They were babbling so, talking a lot of stuff, that Billy and I got way ahead of them with Old Scout. We got up to Redmond's trail and he excused himself to his party; said he wanted to make a call on them. They sat down and had a bite to eat and we went along with him.

"We were welcome as always and so was he. It seems he has known them all—even the first John Redmond. Lived in this cabin we've been using for thirty years. Says he got to be too old to live alone

(he's a man about seventy-five now, but splendid physique), and lives with a married daughter somewhere in the foothills. Earns a little now and then by guiding some of these would-be's, but never could-be's.

"However, they chatted awhile and Mrs. Redmond insisted upon him having a little snack. A perfect hostess, that lady! She made him promise to stop with his party on their way back to-morrow. Incidentally, she reminded us that we are expected also.

"We promised and left and resumed our talk with him. We told him how fine the Redmonds had been to us and the affair at the lake and forest.

"He said to escape from that place of torment was considered a miracle and he commented upon Westy's ability to have stayed up the way he did.

"Then I asked him what he thought of the lake legend and the cliff. He took a chew of tobacco and wagged his head.

" 'Wa'al, I allus believed in it, same's everybody roun' here, I reckon, but here in the late spring one of them government scientists come 'long to look it over. He brought a powerful lot o' loafers with him, too.

" 'They hired me to guide 'em up to the lake fust. Wa'al, after they monkeyed aroun' with all sorts of queer-lookin' appliances 'n' brought up buckets full of dirt out o' the side o' the lake, we started on 'roun' to the forest.

" 'I put my foot down flat when we got there and told 'em I'd camp outside on the trail until—they got out—if they ever did. They laughed at me, but in all my time a pusson was considered right crazy if they went in there.

" 'Along in four days they came out again and the scientist said to me, "Well, Old Scout, we got out all right, didn't we?" I said, Yes, I reckon he did. Now what was it all about I asked him. He told me.

" 'It seems the forest must have been really the camping ground of some tribe long ago, sure enough. He knew the legend, but he said he didn't take any stock in the cliff dwellers. Anyway, these Indians wanted to pertect themselves from enemies, he said, so they moved out on the cliff facing the lake and planted that forest. He says it must o' took two generations and more to perfect this natural fortress. Nothin' but tree after tree, some hardly five feet apart, and they planted them in a puffect circle. It took them scientists four hull days to go around it

and he said they couldn't a-done it in that time if they hadn't known about the circle.

" 'He sez it's the trees make it so damp; they're so big around and so high, no sun ever gits in. Becuz o' the swampy groun' the snakes love it. 'N' with no stream anywheres about, it makes it wuss. Them days Injuns must 'a' been hard-hearted critters.

" 'And the lake?' " I reminded him.

" ' "Yes, that's so," he said. Nothin' ter thet either, accordin' to the scientist. He sez the lake has an almost bottomless depth 'n' becuz of its narrer basin and something 'bout an unknown source is what makes them whirlpools, 'specially when a storm's comin' it's wuss. 'N' about it bein' hot water, he sez thet water is rich in mineral substances underneath thet throw out treemenjus heat 'n' with the water churlin' so crazy it's twice as bad.

" 'So, I don't believe in the legend no more. I miss it, too! It was a right nice little story.' "

CHAPTER XXXVIII

SOME LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT

"Do you consider yourself squelched, Westy?" Mr. Wilde teased him. "About the haunted topic, I mean?"

"No, I don't," Westy said and meant it. "Any lake and forest that could make a fellow feel like that is supernatural and I don't care what any hard-boiled scientist says."

"Tell Westy what Old Scout said about the Redmond affair, too," Billy reminded him.

"Yes. He knew all about that story, too, from John Redmond the first. He said that he was a fine fellow, but he liked adventure and was always getting into some innocent scrape when he was a boy in England. Then he ran away from home when he heard about the first cry of gold in this country. His father was a baronet or something and his mother, the countess, was prostrated after her son went away. She almost died and it so enraged his father to see his wife go on so that he sent word to his son never to bring disgrace upon them in

any way. If he did, the father wrote him, the next shock would kill his mother and he, the son, would be responsible and as good as guilty of her murder.

"They must have been awful prudes that family, because John Redmond knew what would happen if they found out about Lone Star. Probably they were so snobbish they would never understand that in her way the Indian girl was as noble and gentle as they. And of course at that time all Europe thought American Indians were a lot of drunkards, thieves and murderers. At any rate, the fear of causing his mother any more anguish kept him back from writing to them after he married Lone Star.

"This Paul Mitchell was a rascal and had had Redmond's confidence about his family affairs. Also, Mitchell, as we have already been told, hated the Indians fiercely and also Lone Star, whom he thought just roped his partner into the whole business to get his money. And he hated his partner for caring for her. Thought he was just spineless and said he'd never give any gold that he had helped to find to an Indian.

"After Mitchell had escaped no one heard of him for a long while, and Redmond had too much family pride and was too much of a gentleman to hunt his

former friend down as a culprit. And when he did hear it was Mitchell himself who wrote to him and warned him that if Redmond tried to make any trouble for him he'd reveal everything to his family. Now it seems that Redmond had a first cousin in England who had great sympathy and understanding for him. They corresponded as often as it was possible for people to correspond in those times and out of the way places. Eventually the cousin's daughter came here, who is the present Mrs. Redmond. She is a high-born woman.

"Mitchell and Redmond were equal partners and they struck it rich. Redmond alone was worth over two million when he died if Mitchell had given it to him.

"One fine day Mitchell moved to Santa Fe along about the time that John Redmond the second was born. So after a short time they met and Mitchell laughed in Redmond's face and told him about never sharing his money with a man who had married an Indian. Besides, Redmond's parents were still both alive and very old, and this he held as a sword over the Englishman's head.

"When Redmond returned he swore he would never go near Mitchell again and in later years he extracted promises from his son and grandson that

they wouldn't either in deference to Lone Star whose race Mitchell had insulted.

"Then the present Mrs. Redmond came into a little money from her mother's estate and this she shared with all and they've been living on it ever since.

"With nothing coming in and all going out, they're about down to the last cent, Old Scout said, but they're too proud to go to the present generation of Mitchells and tell them their plight."

"Where are the present Mitchells?" Westy asked eagerly.

"Living in gilded splendor in Santa Fe, Old Scout told me," Mr. Wilde answered.

"But how can they prove their claim now?" Westy was all interest. "Mitchell stole the paper that was all the witness Redmond had, didn't he?"

"That's the interesting thing. Mitchell with all his antagonism and prejudice against the Indians and which he took out on John Redmond all his life must have had a troubled conscience.

"At all events, it is whispered around Santa Fe and, in fact, some one said it was in the Santa Fe paper at the time, that when old Paul Mitchell died he willed a certain sealed envelope to his son.

"In it was a document and the envelope was never

to be opened during his son's life nor his son's lifetime. But the first son or daughter of his grandson was to open the sealed envelope on the event of their twenty-first birthday, and it hasn't been opened yet. They know nothing of the Redmonds at all, I believe."

"He must have been crazy!" Rip piped up shrilly.

"Not crazy, Rip," his uncle answered. "Just an eccentric, prejudiced, old man who let hate grow like a weed in his life, obliterating honor and everything else that's worth while."

"Why," asked Billy, perplexed, "didn't he want that envelope opened until his great-grandson's maturity? And what makes you think it has something to do with Redmond?"

"Because I think the ingenious old scoundrel figured that the Indian strain would be about faded out in this generation. You see? He wanted his hate to live after him until the Indian was almost forgotten and the race was deteriorating. I may be wrong, but I don't think so."

"Where," Westy asked Mr. Wilde, "do they keep the envelope?"

"In their home, I believe."

CHAPTER XXXIX

FLAMES

"WHAT do you intend doing with that paper," Rip asked Westy on their way to Lola's the next day; "steal it?"

"Of course not! Does a scout steal?"

"No—not a real one!"

"Well, then, what made you ask me a thing like that?"

"Oh, I don't know. On the level though, Wes, what have you up your sleeve?"

"My arm."

"Yes, I know, but what else?"

"Little boys shouldn't ask questions."

"Aw, I won't tell," he pleaded.

"All right—if you want to know, I'm just going to pay the Mitchells a nice friendly call when we get in Santa Fe, that's all!"

"I see," said Rip. "You're too deep for me."

They returned from the Redmond cottage early in the evening. Walking back by way of the brook,

each one seemed listening to all the familiar sounds for the last time.

Lola had insisted upon them staying longer, but they had much packing to do in order to leave early enough in the morning.

"We'll miss this little old bunch of chatter," Billy remarked about the brook.

"We'll miss it all," Mr. Wilde said, "except when it rains."

"What'd you think of Old Scout to-day, Westy?" Mr. Wilde inquired.

"I liked him fine, but he didn't stay long enough for me to get acquainted with him. Didn't care much about the would-be's, though."

"No, who could? They seemed even to be dissatisfied with themselves!"

"Yes," Westy said, "I heard them quarreling. I stepped on three lighted cigarettes while they were there. There'd be no forests at all if the would-be's came here very often."

"There's logic in that," Rip replied.

"You sound like Pee-wee Harris," Westy said.

Two hours later Westy awakened in the dark cabin. The breathing of the rest sounded mechani-

cal as he listened. He could hear the brook so plain in the silence. It was tireless, he thought, day and night flowing on and on, summer and winter. It made him feel tired to think of it.

Something pungent seemed to strike his nostrils like that of burning wood.

"Now, what could that be, I wonder?" he mused. "Must be some embers in the fireplace."

He got out of his bunk and tip-toed to the fireplace. It was stone cold. He went to the door and opened it softly. The acrid odor was not to be mistaken. He went in and got his clothes on.

A few minutes later as Westy sprinted along the trail he saw the dark heavens ahead of him outlined in a dull red glow, and through the trees he could distinguish little red sparks shooting into the air.

The wind was blowing southwest—straight in the direction of the cottage! He ran on. With each few steps he could see the glow in the sky getting brighter and gradually the sparks lengthened into flames and the flames lengthened into shafts of red fire, leaping into the air like whirling dervishes.

Westy fairly leaped ahead, too, wondering if Lola and her grandmother were aware of it. He hadn't

any time to go back and arouse the rest—he had to go on! They must need help or they *would* be needing it very soon.

At last he struck the trail down to the cottage, but stopped as he viewed the strange freak of fate before him.

The fire was confined to only one side of the trail and the side nearest the ravine. That, of course, was fortunate, because it would go no further in that direction.

But a sprightly breeze was blowing southwest, and as it blew through the flaming area it sounded like the light treading of many phantom feet. And it was sweeping—how far had it gone? He rushed forward and all along the way the fire was still ahead of him to the right.

Westy's throat was beginning to feel as scorched as the ground looked where the fire had passed on. His eyes were stinging, but he didn't care, for looking up suddenly, he saw that the fire was now on the very edge of the Redmond clearing.

His ears were pounding against his head from running and the roar of the burning trees was deafening, but above it all he heard a girl's cry.

CHAPTER XL

A HEAP OF EMBERS

WESTY'S heart was wrung with pity when he saw the cottage! The whole side facing the arbor was one sheet of flame and the arbor now existed only in memory.

The two lone occupants were standing on the other side of the brook surrounded by a few possessions they had been able to save. Lola cried when she saw Westy.

"Did you get everything out? Are you hurt, either of you?" He reached them breathless.

"No, not hurt." The tears were rolling down her cheeks. "But, Westy," she sobbed, "we forgot the one thing that means most to us now!"

"What's that?" he cried.

"An ebony case," Mrs. Redmond cried, for Lola was too overcome with emotion to talk. "It contains papers identifying us as kin of John Redmond. Oh, dear," the woman cried, "we haven't much chance without it!"

"Where is it?" Westy cried. "Quick!"

"You can't get it—it's probably gone now! It was right in the top bedroom dresser drawer—the first one. I don't know how I came to miss it. Look!"

True, the place was a veritable inferno, but Westy rolled over in the brook and soaked himself from head to foot and started into the cottage, in spite of their protestations.

How he ever managed to keep his feet on the little rickety stairway he didn't know. It was seething with the heat.

The little upper floor was ablaze, and part of the floors had already fallen, so Westy had to step warily. He didn't need any light; fortunately the flames were torch enough.

The flames were licking about the foot of the dresser as he opened the drawer and found what he was after. Grasping the case, he put it inside of his blouse and rushed for the stairway again. But it was no more than a lot of burning spindles now and the lower floor with its quaint old pioneer furniture was a helpless victim to the malevolent flames.

He ran to the window over the front door and

climbed out and down on the ivy-covered trellis now so dry that it crackled as his hands clung to its support. As he jumped to the ground he faced the little white door that had blown shut.

The little door, Westy thought, that had opened and shut to three generations of Redmonds. A door that had felt the trample of little feet over its threshold and stood open to let the sunshine into all their lives and shut itself against the tempests.

It didn't seem just, Westy thought, to shut in those memories; all the hopes and fears that the years had brought and left behind. It wouldn't be fair to give up the spirit of all that love, faith and loyalty to the merciless destroyer. So he opened the door.

The two homeless creatures grasped Westy's hands in their gratitude and he noticed that the worst of their grief was now passed. They seemed to be resigned and watched their beloved little home gradually reduced to a heap of burning embers, as the fire died out on the edge of the brook.

Westy felt a drop of rain on his forehead, then another, and as it started to patter steadily on the dry leaves they arose from the ground.

Why couldn't that have happened before? he thought. Fate always worked things backwards, and he spoke his thoughts to Lola.

"No, not backwards," she said gravely, "but for the best."

Wonderful people, he told himself. Take life, death and laughter just as it comes.

As they walked into the darkness toward the shack, Westy saw them turn—a look on their faces as they viewed the desolate scene that perplexed him. It seemed to be a look of relief, as though they had been freed of the bonds that bound them to the past.

Joining him again, he heard Lola sigh wearily and wondered if it were sleepiness or a sigh of doubt as to the future.

CHAPTER XLI

WESTY HAS A PART TO PLAY

THEY met Rip, his uncle and Billy before they were half way. As he told them later, they'd make a fine lot of applicants for volunteer firemen, sleeping as sound as that.

"Well, how did we know?" Rip asked; "you never let us know!"

Westy explained to them that time had been at a premium and so that part of the matter was dropped.

It seemed to them all that the greatest sympathy they could give to the unfortunate girl and her grandmother was silence.

Mr. Wilde suggested that nothing more be said until morning, and they could make more plans then. They gave up the shack to the women and put up their tents outside. It was almost dawn when they settled down for a few winks.

When they awoke the sun was flooding their tents with a warm yellow light. As Westy and Rip were dressing Mr. Wilde came in.

"We've got to leave here to-day, kids," he said, "much as I hate to, but I was thinking we could leave all our camping stuff. These people will need it and all the food we have. We won't need it again anyway in Santa Fe."

"But what are they going to do?" Westy asked. "I could tell last night they're about down to brass tacks."

"That's what I came in to tell you," he continued. "I'm going to see to it that they get a supply of food, but in the meantime a little investigating is going to be done. Lola's just promised to give me those identification papers when we go. May not even have to use them, but it's best to have them in case they're needed. She told me all that Old Scout had said about it was true."

Westy was keyed up to a high pitch of interest now.

"Now," Mr. Wilde said seriously and at the same time wriggled the cigar over to the other side of his mouth, "you, Westy, have your little part to play in this, and if you fail I think some legal steps can be taken."

"Oh, boy, that's my middle name!" Westy was enthusiastic. "Where does my part come in?"

"Just this: Lola told me that Paul Mitchell the third has a son just about your age."

"Well, what's that got to do with me?"

"Nothing, only that he's a Boy Scout!"

CHAPTER XLII

SETTING OUT TO DO IT

THEY had left Lamy and were climbing steadily upward. Westy was looking out of the train window at the uninhabited miles of land, relieved by the juniper, piñon and scrub dotting the landscape."

"Here's hoping the city of Santa Fe is one of promise," Mr. Wilde remarked. "I haven't really thought out any special line of attack as yet."

"Well, I think you can leave that part to me," Westy said with a tone of finality. "I've planned it all out."

"I'm glad to hear it. What is your first step? That's all you need tell me."

"To ask the clerk at the hotel where the Mitchells live and how to get there."

"That sounds good. No beating around the bush for you, eh? Go straight for the mark—that's good sense. I'll give you time enough. We have to beat

it in a week or so. You ought to find out what's what in that space of time, eh?"

"Sure. Easy!"

They were in the station and could hear the enthusiastic cries of the hackmen and busmen and taxi drivers. Certainly a conglomeration, Westy thought as they stepped into a Ford taxi and were whisked to their hotel.

"This bird must have had his training on Forty-second Street," Billy said, as the taxi driver perilously piloted his car through a street so narrow that two people could have shaken hands across the street without leaving the sidewalk.

At the hotel they all registered before Westy, and when it came his turn he looked up at the clerk, an amiable-looking chap, and smiled broadly.

No one ever could resist the warmth of Westy's smile and this clerk was certainly more than susceptible. He smiled back.

"Came quite a distance to Santa Fe?" he said cordially. "Staying long?"

"No, only a week," Westy answered.

"Well, you can see a lot in that time," he said, "if you're observing."

"Oh, I'm observant, all right," Westy remarked casually. "I'm a Boy Scout!"

"Oh, are you?" He seemed interested.

"Sure. We always like to meet scouts when we go to other cities. Do you happen to know any?"

Mr. Wilde, seeing that Westy was started on the right track, motioned Billy and Rip to go on up with him to their rooms.

"No, I don't know any," the clerk said, leaning over the counter, "but I know of them. There's a mighty rich family here that's always donating to them. The son is in it, I think. See it in the papers often. They're multi-millionaires and live near the outskirts of the city. Snobs, though, I hear!"

"Huh," Westy said. "Know their name?"

"Mitchell."

Westy entered the room, a broad grin on his face.

"I see you've hit it!" Mr. Wilde said.

"Harder than that," he said and got into his scout suit.

"What," said Rip, "so quick?"

"Sure. A scout has got to get on the job while the getting is good."

"Atta boy!" Billy remarked.

When he was all ready and went to the door he turned back as Mr. Wilde spoke.

"We're going to take some shots of the Plaza here, Westy! It used to be the western terminus of the Old Trail. If you don't find us here when you get back take a stroll on down."

A few minutes later Westy was hurrying through quiet, narrow, unpaved streets, lined on each side with one-story adobes.

Some Santa Feans strolling leisurely along in the mid-afternoon sun stopped to turn and look after Westy's slim figure, so gorgeously arrayed in complete scout attire.

Westy was unconscious of any stares, however. He walked on indifferent to the picturesque Tesuque Indian with his black hair bound with its scarlet bandeau and brilliantly colored blanket.

The cries of the newspaper boys with their English and Spanish papers he left behind as he entered the residential district, where one could see at first glance that the adobes here were much larger and more pretentious.

Inquiring the way of a very Spanish-looking gentleman, Westy felt quite grown up as that honorable Don greeted him with a "Buenos días, señor!"

He walked away after he had been given the information, but had only gone a few feet when the Don called him back. He nodded ahead in the direction of a boy about Westy's age who was standing in conversation with an older boy.

"That is the young Señor Mitchell just ahead," the man told him.

CHAPTER XLIII

PAUL MITCHELL

WESTY thanked him and the man walked on and disappeared in one of the picturesque adobes.

The young Señor Mitchell bid his companion adieu also and they went in opposite directions, so Westy hurried after him.

As he got near him he walked slow on purpose and passed in front of him leisurely. He could feel the close scrutiny that young Mitchell gave him as he passed.

"Hello, Scout!"

Westy turned and smiled.

"Hello!"

"Stranger?"

"Sure. Martin, Bridgeboro, N. J."

"Go on! Mitchell—I go to Crestwood."

"N. J.?"

"Betcha."

"What luck!" said Westy. "Crestwood Boys' School isn't far from my house."

"I'm hardly ever home," said Mitchell.

Westy could tell it by his New Jersey accent. It was true his manner was a trifle snobbish, but Westy rather liked him.

"What you doing in town, Martin?"

He told him and they walked on through the streets. They exchanged views on scout matters and after a while they came to a curio shop and Westy stopped a minute to look in the show window. Navajo blankets and silver jewelry, Pueblo pottery and moccasins and all the other little fascinating things one sees in the Santa Fe shops. He remarked about the skill of the Indians in making those things.

"Yes, they are!" Mitchell agreed. "Still, none of my family have ever had much use for Indians and yet we've lived with them around us all our lives."

Getting warmer, Westy thought.

"How's that, Mitchell?"

"Gee, I don't know. Guess they don't know themselves."

They reached the hotel and Westy invited him up to his room. He accepted. He seemed to want to hear all about the adventures Rip and he had had with the members of Educational Films.

Westy related to him about the hold-up and how he and Rip had kept it so quiet. In the middle of his recital he jumped up out of the chair in which he was sitting and whipped out his watch.

"You'll have to excuse me, Martin. 'S almost dinner time and Dad's a terrible fusser when we're late. Come up to the house to-morrow afternoon and let's hear the rest." He shook hands with Westy and was gone.

The next afternoon Westy was on the job and admitted into the Mitchell home by a Mexican butler with an expressionless face.

Young Mitchell came forward to meet him and greeted him cordially, leading Westy out into a spacious plazita and introduced him to his father and mother. They actually seemed to unbend from their assumed mental stiffness as he smiled in his naïve way.

Westy was the kind of a boy that made people act natural. He had that genuineness of spirit and character that forced them to drop the artificialities and smile at the realities.

Indeed, the Mitchells were so taken with Westy's boyish charm and ruggedness that they insisted on his staying to dinner.

After the dinner hour was over and they sat out in the plazita again, Westy watched the setting sun throwing its rose-colored shadows through the trees and hollyhocks along the yonder wall.

It was a quaint, charming place, this Santa Fe, with its Spanish atmosphere and alluring traditions. It all made him think of two lonely people in a little mountain shack who had put their entire trust in a boy.

He was wondering if they, too, were thinking and watching the sunset shadows against the mountain walls while they stood amongst the charred embers that had been their home. He was startled out of his reveries by Mr. Mitchell's voice.

"I hear you've had some thrilling experiences in the mountains, Westy! Tell us about them!"

Westy thought a moment and wondered if the occasion was propitious. He hadn't much time! Nothing like getting it over with, he reasoned, as Mrs. Mitchell laid down the book she was reading to listen to him.

He told them of their strange meeting with Lola and the charming little ivy-covered cottage with its flower garden and related her story of Lone Star

with its touch of sweet romance. He was careful not to divulge the names of either young men in the story whom the Indian Princess had aided.

And he went on to tell of those two lonely creatures who were living in poverty now, a lady approaching old age and a girl who had all the charming quaintness of the old world.

He didn't omit a detail even down to old Mitchell's prejudice, having kept them from having what was rightfully theirs.

Their own terrible ordeal in the forest Westy told him, but skimming it over lightly and laying more stress on the plight of Lola and her grandmother.

When he came to the part in this real-life narrative of the cottage burning and all their homely possessions going, Westy actually saw a tear fall on Mrs. Mitchell's cheek.

"They have been shamefully treated," Mr. Mitchell finally said. "Who are these people?"

"Their name is Redmond," Westy answered, and waited to see the effect it had. But he was disappointed, for the name meant nothing to them.

"Who did you say the man was who so misused the confidence of the first John Redmond?"

"It's quite coincidental," Westy said, feeling his way over thin ice, "but it is said his descendants also live in Santa Fe."

"And his name?"

"Paul Mitchell!"

CHAPTER XLIV

ON THE RIGHT TRAIL

"Of course," Westy said, pretending he didn't see them start, "there's other Mitchells here!"

"No." Mr. Mitchell looked grave. "Not that I know of! My grandfather was Paul Mitchell."

"Did you say that these people heard about a sealed envelope in the family having been willed to my son?" Mrs. Mitchell was now aroused also.

"Yes, that's the way I heard it. They saw it in the Santa Fe paper, I think."

"You are right, Westy," the older man said. "That envelope is in this house now. In my safe and worth a fortune—— Is it possible to wire Miss and Mrs. Redmond?"

"Yes. It would take two days to reach them, though."

"That would be all right. It would give us all time. I'll wire them enough to get here with and meantime I'll see my attorney. There's a part of the Mitchell fortune that we've never been allowed

to touch. Always have been in the dark about it, but can see the light through it now. When my grandfather willed the sealed envelope to my son we had an idea it contained instructions of how to dispose of the forbidden part. I'll find out if my grandsire had a codicil to the will which would make my son's share forfeitable should the envelope be prematurely opened."

"Yes," Mrs. Mitchell said, "whatever wrong has been done must be righted and I guess it looks as though Fate has chosen Westy." She had risen simultaneously with him and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Come for dinner Sunday and bring your friends," she said.

They all shook hands and as Westy started to leave he saw the Mexican butler move from behind a tree and fairly glide into the house. He called good-night and young Mitchell walked out with him.

"It'll be great having you to dinner on Sunday. You can be there when your friends come; it'll surprise them. G'night!"

"Good-night!"

Westy felt that he had earned a night's repose when he got in his room. Rip was already in bed

and Billy and Mr. Wilde were draped in graceless attitudes about the various chairs. They had the look of having been waiting for news, so he told them as he undressed.

"You're some little fixer, Wes!" Mr. Wilde complimented him. "Are they nice people?"

"Oh, sure," he answered, "after they thaw out. They invited all of you dubs up for dinner Sunday."

"Is that a nice way to speak to Papa Wilde, Westy?"

"No, it's not considered nice, but it's more human."

"You're a sketch! No, we won't butt in on this Mitchell affair at all—not even Rip! It's going to be your party. We'll have a chance to say good-by to Lola and Mrs. Redmond before they go, I guess. Anyhow, we're only too tickled that everything looks rosy!"

"Yes, he never questioned their story at all."

"Then there's no cause to worry, do you think?"

"No, only about getting to bed," Billy said between yawns.

Billy could always break up the party.

CHAPTER XLV

VOICES

SATURDAY afternoon young Mitchell burst in upon Westy with the news that Lola and Mrs. Redmond had wired back. They were coming on the Sunday evening train.

"Everything's set now, Martin," he said excitedly. "Dad says the attorney O. K.'d opening the envelope and made an appointment to have him bring your friends to his office Monday morning."

"That sounds good," Westy said. "I'm glad for their sake."

"Get up to the house early to-morrow—I'll show you some of my things."

The next day Westy met young Mitchell before he got halfway to their home. He was coming along at breakneck speed on a motorcycle and stopped short right by him.

"Hallo!" he greeted. "Some stunt, eh, Martin? I don't ride this tin can very often except when I have too much surplus energy. Then I try stunts."

"You mean you try to break your neck. I'd like to have that tin can just the same," Westy said enviously.

"Want to hop on? I'll show your some peachy tricks before we go home."

Westy got on and watched him steer with a steady hand.

"See that car ahead?" he asked Westy.

"Yeh. What about it?"

"Well, just watch me cut in front of it and swerve out on the road again."

"Yes, I'll watch you all right. I better watch myself. It'd be just my luck to fall off. I'm no whiner though—go to it!"

Young Mitchell needed no further inducements. He got up in back of the big sedan and with a roar and lurch he speeded ahead and cut in front of the car, and before Westy knew it they were back on the road again with the sedan stalled back in the distance.

He laughed, but all Westy could do was smile—he didn't feel that it was a laughing matter.

"Want to see me do it again?"

"I couldn't say no if I tried," Westy said resignedly.

"Watch me closely then and you can learn!"

By the time Mitchells had dinner early Sunday evening Westy had become quite adept in cutting motor cars with a motorcycle.

At dinner the conversation was about the expected arrivals that evening.

The Mexican butler, gliding in and out from the kitchen to the dining-room, seemed to be aware of everything that was needed, yet Westy couldn't see that he looked at anything. He just seemed to look ahead all the time, his little beady eyes perfectly expressionless. A little man he was, with swarthy skin and shiny black hair. A perfect butler, no doubt, but Westy didn't like him.

"Baptiste!" Mr. Mitchell addressed him as he was bending over the server on the opposite side of the room.

"Yees, sir!" His English was broken and he turned from what he was doing.

"Order the big car," Mr. Mitchell said; "we are going down to the station to meet some guests!"

"Yees, sir!" Baptiste answered as he turned to finish his duties at the server.

"Well, that's that," Mr. Mitchell was saying. "We'll get the envelope out of the tin box in the safe

to-morrow and give those people what's coming to them!"

At that juncture the butler glanced at Mr. Mitchell and left the room.

"Say, Dad, I was telling Westy it'd be good fun to have him wait here until we get back and surprise his friends. It'll be more friendly when they come in to see him, don't you think?"

"Certainly!" Mrs. Mitchell said.

"Go up in the library while we're gone and read what you like. You can roam all over the house if you want to," Mr. Mitchell added.

Young Mitchell took him up in the library and showed him what was most interesting, so five minutes after they had all left for the station Westy was comfortably ensconced in a big library chair. It was so big it completely hid him from view and he browsed to his heart's content.

The big house was silent; the kitchen noises had stopped and he could hear the two servants padding up the back stairway to their rooms. A little later he heard them go down again—a door closed somewhere in the back and the sounds of two pair of feet stepping along the gravel driveway reminded him that Sunday night was the servants' night.

A clock chimed the quarter of the hour and then the house lapsed into silence again.

It seemed to Westy that he must have been reading for hours, so intent was he on his book. But he wasn't reading long at that, for the clock chimed the half hour, and he heard the padding of two pairs of shoes coming up the broad stairway.

He listened as they stopped at the open doorway of the library. The one leading must have stopped abruptly, as its follower shuffled his feet on the polished floor he stopped so suddenly.

"There ees not much time," the first voice said, right in the room with Westy.

It was Baptiste; he knew the voice and was thankful the big chair was hiding him.

"The safe," Baptiste went on talking, "ees right here!"

CHAPTER XLVI

A TRUST WELL KEPT

He heard hurried movements and low mutterings, probably in their frenzy to open the safe. Then an exclamation as if it finally yielded.

"Ah," Baptiste exclaimed. "That's why I look at Meester Mitchell open the safe. Now I open it, see?"

"The leetle tin box," the other Mexican exclaimed; "it's locked!"

Then he heard the heavy safe door swing shut and the sound of footsteps toward the hall.

"We weel open it at my house then!"

They went out of the room and, as they padded down the stairs, Westy jumped up quietly and followed. As he got to the head of the stairs the other Mexican went on out, while Baptiste was extinguishing the lights, leaving only a dim night light burning in the hall.

As Westy got halfway down the stairs Baptiste went out also, so he hurried out after him quietly

and hid behind some shrubbery in the driveway. The other Mexican was leaning over a rickety-looking Ford touring car and he put the precious tin box in the back seat, while Baptiste climbed in behind the wheel.

Westy's mind was working fast. The Mexican got in the front seat also and as Baptiste turned on his tail light the scout's heart leaped with joy as he saw young Mitchell's motorcycle parked back in the driveway.

With the usual trembling of tin the Ford drove out into the roadway headed for the outskirts of the city. Before it had gone a block and a half, however, Westy was out of the driveway on the motorcycle and like a shot went after them.

Whether it was a guilty conscience or not, something prompted Baptiste to step on his gas and go the limit.

"Well, I'll go the limit, too," Westy said, "whether it's my motorcycle or not."

As he passed the corner on one wheel he saw a policeman standing talking to some people in another Ford and Westy shouted for them to follow.

Looking back, he saw they had started and so he

went on. He knew Baptiste couldn't keep it up with the exception that he might slip into some dark road and lose him.

So he crawled up easy just as young Mitchell had showed him and got alongside of the Ford. He raised himself then, just in a half standing position and reached over in the back seat of the touring car.

The handle of the little tin box was upright and it was the will of Providence that this was so or Westy could never have grasped it with one hand.

Indeed, it all happened so quickly that neither Baptiste nor his companion realized what had happened.

With one hand grasping the tin box close to his breast and the other on the steering gear, Westy proved to Baptiste that he could do almost as good as young Mitchell when it came to stunts.

He slowed down again—and then rushed forward with a lurch and a roar, cutting in front of the ramshackle Ford.

But Westy forgot one thing that young Mitchell had taught him. He forgot that the feat required both hands on the steering gear, for as he cut in front of it he held more tightly to the tin box than

he did to the motorcycle, and as it lurched it hit a deep rut in the road and threw him bodily—into the field beyond.

The policeman picked him up a few seconds later—unconscious—but against his breast the tin box was tightly clasped.

CHAPTER XLVII

HOMEWARD BOUND

WHEN Westy opened his eyes again he was in the Mitchell library—on the divan.

A doctor sat by him, Mr. Wilde and Rip and Billy—also the Mitchells. In the open doorway Lola and Mrs. Redmond stood smiling, then came forward.

"You're tiptop now," said the doctor, taking his case. "You must be made of rubber. Only stunned, that was all."

"Where's the Mexicans?" Westy asked.

"In the lock-up!" Mr. Wilde said.

"Hello, Lola!"

"Hello yourself, Westy! You have almost broken your neck for us this time, haven't you?"

"That's what he said he'd do!" piped up Rip, "if it would help you people!"

"Aw, forget it!" Westy was embarrassed with all these admirers looking on.

"I know I think you're a fine boy," said Mr.

Mitchell, "and I want to thank you for exposing an untrustworthy servant."

"Your courage was splendid," Mrs. Mitchell added.

"Well, come on, kid." Billy was attempting to lift Westy as if to carry him, but the scout frustrated his attempt and stood on his own feet. "All right"—Billy was not a bit balked—"as long as you can walk. But we must get to bed—it's getting late!"

And as usual Billy busted up the party.

What thoughts crowded through Westy's mind no one will ever know but himself as he stood with his friends once again on the observation platform—this time homeward-bound!

The Mitchells had bid him farewell and promised to visit him, especially young Mitchell, who said he'd be Johnny on the spot in Bridgeboro after he went back to school.

But Lola and Mrs. Redmond. It was different to bid them good-by with their eyes moist and smiling faces. They also promised to visit them.

They weren't going back to the mountains again—not for a while. They were going to sup the joy out of the cup of Life. It was glorious to see them—

their happiness and joy emanating from their very expressions.

Only a few days until the matter would be settled and they would have what belonged to them—never to want again!

The train moved out slowly and it seemed to them, standing on the moving train, that all humanity was calling farewell. Then as the distance widened between them the outline of their forms became blurred and faded from view.

The shadows of twilight had stolen upon them. It was the witching hour in the mountains—the time for rest, repose and meditation.

As Westy looked upward where the white peaks of the Sierra Sangre de Cristo leaned majestically against the heavens, he listened instinctively again for the murmur of the brook. What was it he heard instead?

The train slowed down as they took a curve and from afar in the distance came the sweet yet sad tinkle of the vesper bells.

"Must be that old Cathedral in Santa Fe we hear it from," Mr. Wilde said; "the air is so clear it carries."

A porter looked out of the door and nodded to Billy.

"Youah berth's made up, sir!"

"Got to get to bed, brothers! Good-night!"

They answered and he disappeared in the car.

Westy fell in a reverie again, as the tinkle of the bells were lost in the noise of the speeding train.

"They're beautiful, though," he said dreamily, "those vesper bells!"

Mr. Wilde looked at him and then shook his head in perplexity.

"You're a hard nut to crack, Westy!"

"There's no need of trying to crack me at all."

"Why?"

"I guess I was born that way!"

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That strange hen? Why does it waltz? And what is the secret of the prowling peril? Then, even as the Hindu had earlier died so quickly and mysteriously, the boys' old friend disappears. Then comes the final ludicrous climax.

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Jerry Todd and his chums leagued together to help another boy save a peculiar invention of his father's, a talking frog, from thieving hands,—wait breathlessly in the lonely brick house where the puzzle maker had met with such a strange death. Fun and mystery here!

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